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Original Research

"I feel happy when I surf because it takes stress from my mind": An Initial Exploration of Program Theory within Waves for Change Surf Therapy in Post-Conflict Liberia

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ABSTRACT

Surf therapy is a novel form of sport for development (SFD) intervention being utilized to support well-being within post-conflict settings. There is currently little research exploring surf therapy program theory in SFD contexts. Theoretical exploration is important for optimization, monitoring, and further expansion of service delivery. This research utilized pragmatic qualitative methods to explore participant-perceived impacts and outcomes within the Waves for Change (W4C) surf therapy intervention, as implemented in Harper, Liberia, that aims to support youth well-being. Twenty-three past W4C participants (17 males and 6 females, mean age = 15.8 years, SD = 3.6 years, range 11-25 years) took part in semistructured interviews about their experiences of surf therapy. Data were analyzed through constant comparative analysis. Six impacts and outcomes were identified within three intervention domains: Social, Skills Curriculum/Bananas Culture, and Surfing. The findings highlight sport as an adaptable vehicle for improving well-being and skills within successful intervention delivery while providing a foundation for further in-depth exploration of program theory. Furthermore, the findings provide empirical evidence on how to optimize and proliferate surf therapy within other post-conflict settings. The findings also provide transferable conclusions for the improvement of SFD more generally.

INTRODUCTION

The direct and indirect consequences of armed conflict such as civil war have been linked to higher mental disorder prevalence among conflict-exposed youth (Attanayake et al., 2009). These mental challenges are intergenerational by nature, leading to long-term negative mental health propagated within family dynamics (Betancourt et al., 2015). Between 1989 and 2004, the West African country of Liberia experienced devastating civil war defined by widespread human rights abuses and collapsing infrastructure. The country continues to experience a range of post-conflict challenges and human rights abuse such as gender-based violence, ritualistic killing, economic inequality, and civil unrest (United Nations, 2016). Negative mental health and poor well-being is prevalent in children (under the age of 14) and youth (15-24) in Liberia within the context of complete collapse of protective communal, family, and social structures (Borba et al., 2016). To start addressing these challenges, priority areas for at-risk Liberian youth have been identified including counselling, skills training, community reintegration, and recreation (Levey et al., 2013). Aligned with these priority areas is the Waves for Change (W4C) surf therapy intervention. W4C aims to combine surfing, mentoring, and social support to improve the well-being of at-risk youth in Liberia.

The W4C intervention in Liberia is an example of sport for development (SFD) within a post-conflict setting. SFD is an

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ever-increasing paradigm defined as "the intentional use of sport, physical activity and play to attain specific development objectives" (Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group, 2009, p.305). There remains a global paucity of rigorous evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of SFD (Langer, 2015; Whitley, Massey, Camiré, Blom, et al., 2019; Whitley, Massey, Camiré, Boutet, et al., 2019) though promising results can be seen within organizational evaluations, annual reports, and nonpeer reviewed grey material within the sector. This paucity of research is also reflected within SFD interventions targeting mental health outcomes among youth in post-conflict situations (Hamilton et al., 2016). While a recent study in Liberia demonstrated how a targeted and carefully designed SFD intervention can achieve developmental goals with marginalized youth (Blom et al., 2020), this study was limited by a lack of control group within the study design.

Within the SFD paradigm, action sports have been highlighted as having significant potential for impact (Thorpe, 2014) despite only making up 1.9% of SFD organizations (Svensson & Woods, 2017). Action sports are compatible with an "interventionist approach" to SFD and differ from traditional rule-bound competitive sports due to: (a) competitive structure not being a requirement, (b) goals being defined on a personal level, and (c) the use of public or natural spaces instead of defined play areas such as a pitch or court (Thorpe, 2014). Examples of action sports include skateboarding, climbing, mountain biking, and surfing. Despite positive case studies (Thorpe, 2014), evidence for the effectiveness of action sports for development remains limited. The action sport of surfing has provided the vehicle for a range of interventions collectively known as surf therapy. A recent review that explored the strength of evidence for the effectiveness of surf therapy found promising results relating to mental health for children and youth, though there remains a need for further rigorous study (Benninger et al., 2020).

Specific to W4C, this surf therapy intervention has been associated with positive well-being outcomes through regular internal evaluation using validated measurement tools (Waves for Change, 2019). In 2016, a randomized controlled trial (RCT) testing W4C intervention outcomes was carried out in South Africa as part of a master's project (Snelling, 2016). The RCT found no statistically significant change to well-being or behavioral outcomes within the intervention. Limitations included low statistical power, challenges around intervention fidelity, and consistency of delivery. The study concluded that the W4C surf therapy intervention is highly feasible and warranted further study despite the observed lack of changes to outcomes. A specific recommendation for further study within W4C was targeted exploration of program theory.

Program theory, or how SFD achieves its outcomes, has been highlighted as a research priority in both W4C and wider SFD literature (Hamilton et al., 2016). Meta-analyses, systematic reviews, and literature reviews have highlighted a range of factors that influence positive youth development through sport, all of which contribute to building an SFD program theory. For example, Holt et al. (2017) identified three key domains to Positive Youth Development (PYD) and SFD program theory: (a) PYD climate, (b) life-skills program focus, and (c) PYD outcomes. The study also distinguished between implicit and explicit processes. Massey and Williams (2020) stressed the importance of a contextually and theoretically targeted approach to SFD. Jones et al. (2017) consolidated similar findings (sporting and nonsporting based contexts, strategic use of targeted nonsport programming) into a systematic logic model to better understand program theory within PYD. Metastudies have also identified common individual mediators within SFD program theory, such as positive and strong adult and peer relationships (Holt et al., 2017). Skill-building activities and activities to support the transfer of skills outside of sport alongside personal/social development, such as improving confidence or self-worth were also highlighted (Holt et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2017). Within research focused on youth who have experienced trauma, theoretical mediators included psychological escape, the embodied nature of sport, and a sense of belonging (Massey & Williams, 2020). Another important consideration for SFD and PYD is the place of life-skill transfer within program theory. There exist multiple models for effective life-skill transfer in sport that discuss theoretical mediators such as the context of interventions, assets such as coaches, and structures around how transfer of skills to wider life occurs **(**Camiré, 2014; Gould & Carson, 2008; Petitpas et al., 2005; Pierce et al., 2017). Despite these findings, a large proportion of populations reviewed were not based in post-conflict settings and, as such, contextual differences must be considered.

In contrast to the broader SFD field, there has been minimal rigorous exploration of program theory and theoretical mediators within the emerging surf therapy paradigm (Britton et al., 2020; Benninger et al., 2020). To date, only one study has specifically explored program theory with surf therapy for children and youth (Marshall et al., 2019). This study sought to understand program theory through the experiences of children and youth participants in the Wave Project mental health intervention based in the United Kingdom. Marshall et al.'s (2019) work highlighted autonomous progression, mastery, and social connections as

key to youth mental health outcomes. This study also noted the following mediators as integral to intervention success: (a) sport-induced respite, (b) a safe space at the intervention, and (c) positive relationships. These findings mirror wider SFD and PYD literature (Holt et al., 2017; Massey & Williams, 2020). Further exploration of surf therapy program theory should be mindful of these mediators alongside the contextual differences between children and youth in the United Kingdom and those living in post-conflict settings (e.g., participant background, types of trauma, access to mental health services, and societal support).

In sum, there is a need for the development of program theory in both SFD (Hamilton et al., 2016) and surf therapy (Benninger et al., 2020; Britton et al., 2020). This study builds on previous research with an initial exploration of the W4C intervention in Liberia, with a particular focus on participant-perceived impacts and outcomes. A nascent program theory for W4C was presented as part of the RCT (Snelling, 2016), which was informed by research indicating the importance of safe spaces, social support, and mind/body therapy (Benninger & Savahl, 2016; Brendtro et al., 2002; Center on the Developing Child, 2015). However, this program theory must be viewed with caution due to the lack of input from participants. Without a rigorous participant-led exploration of W4C program theory, it is impossible to understand if the theoretical recommendations from previous stakeholder research (Benninger & Savahl, 2016; Rolfe, 2016) have been implemented. Exploration of participant experiences also allows for the development of different or new conceptualizations of W4C program theory. Furthermore, knowledge gaps were compounded by the fact that all research conducted by W4C has been focused on their South Africa programming rather than their site in Liberia. While targeted intervention outcomes may be similar, the two contexts are very different given Liberia's post-conflict setting. This study sought to explore and contribute to key knowledge gaps within the W4C evidence base by developing an initial exploratory program theory based on participant experiences of surf therapy in Liberia.

METHODS

Study Site: Waves for Change Liberia

W4C was founded in 2009 as a small surfing club run for youth in the Masiphumelele Township, Cape Town, South Africa. The founders recognized that surfing was a novel way to engage local children and youth. In an effort to provide more social support, the founders reached out to local social services but found such services were underresourced. As the organization grew, it teamed up with mental health professionals from the University of Western Cape and University of Cape Town to develop a surf therapy curriculum that combined surfing with evidence-based mind/body therapy. The curriculum refers to evidence-based activities that are then integrated into W4C program theory and delivery. The curriculum was developed through engagement with local children and youth (Benninger & Savahl, 2016) and a review of different therapeutic techniques that had been found to be effective in children and youth. These therapeutic techniques specifically included elements of cognitive behavioral therapy, goal setting and emotional monitoring/regulation (Center on the Developing Child, 2015), and breathing and meditation techniques (Brendtro et al., 2002). The W4C curriculum overview can be found here. W4C currently works with 1800 children (aged 11-14 years) annually in at-risk communities in South Africa. These children face challenges associated with food insecurity, abuse, exposure to trauma, violence, and living in a turbulent social setting. The intervention is associated with improvements to participants' well-being, self-esteem, and effective use of learned skills in conflict resolution and maintaining a calm attitude (Waves for Change, 2019). The intervention also incorporates a "Surf Club" comprised of previous participants until the age of 17. Active members of this club also have a pathway to become future W4C mentors, offering unique insight to the role as previous participants.

W4C Liberia was piloted in 2016 as the first site in which the W4C curriculum was delivered outside South Africa. The intervention has expanded, reaching up to 150 children and youth (aged 9-20 years) per year in Harper, in southern Liberia. W4C Liberia is one of the only examples of surf therapy being delivered in a post-conflict zone. W4C Liberia has a growing Surf Club and has recently completed a pilot program based in the capital Monrovia. As the Monrovia site was only at initial pilot stage at the time of data collection, this study was exclusively focused on W4C in Harper.

Program Theory

Program theory interprets pathways that explain the theory of change linking intervention inputs to intervention outputs, with pathways comprising theoretical mediators (Bauman et al., 2002). Program theory exists as both a product and process illustrating pathways to impact and is by its very nature interpretive (Vogel, 2012). This study explored participant perceptions of impacts and outcomes of the W4C intervention to produce a linear logic model to visualize an initial program theory (Rogers, 2008). The mapping of these contextually perceived impacts and

outcomes is labelled an "initial program theory" within the definition of program theory as a process (Vogel, 2012). This exploratory step provides the foundation and direction for further study to build a comprehensive program theory. The individual evidence-based activities of the curriculum were treated as inputs in this study with their implementation an investigated activity. Interrogation of these individual items was deemed a secondary priority to exploring wider implementation for the intervention, given their basis in established theory. A logic model visualization allows for easier engagement by researchers and practitioners. The visualization breaks down participant-perceived impacts and outcomes while also demonstrating directionality. Specific training, investigation, and development of these mediators allow for continued investigation and development of program theory, further service optimization, geographic translation, and comparison with relevant frameworks such as the Sport-for-Health model (Schulenkorf & Siefken, 2019).

Ethics

Ethical approval was granted by the Edinburgh Napier School of Applied Sciences Ethics Committee on 25/01/2019 (Reference Code: SAS0052). This process involved in-depth discussion of research protocols with a committee independent of the study and was the most rigorous ethical review process available to the team. W4C staff were involved in this process to best inform ethical practices in line with the local context. All participants and parents of participants were given information about the study through a range of methods to ensure all consent was suitably informed.

Positionality and Reflexivity

The research team included individuals with a variety of prior experiences around surf therapy practice, mental health, clinical psychology, and surf science. The breadth of expertise allowed for honest discussion about prior assumptions and steps to ensure conclusions were truly substantiated within participant data. The lead researcher recognized his cultural outsider status as a white Scottish male within the Liberian context throughout the research process, including at the design phase. This was contrasted to a potential insider status based on extensive engagement with the surf therapy paradigm, including as a practitioner prior to becoming a full-time researcher. There are both strengths and weaknesses to an insider or outsider approach to conducting research (Manohar et al., 2019), but recognition and reflective engagement with outsider status is of paramount importance, especially given inherent and potentially uncomfortable power structures that may exist (Hill & Dao, 2020). The lead researcher's prolonged engagement with W4C in Liberia prior to any data collection was based on a recognition of this and aimed to build up trust, familiarity, and open communication both within the intervention and among the local community. This process was centered on sincerity, honesty, and transparency around the research project, its motives, and the lead researcher's background (Hill & Dao, 2020). It was not an attempt to gain cultural insider status. Reflective practice was utilized throughout the study to highlight awareness of personal preconceptions, acknowledge outsider status, bolster credibility, supplement analysis, and add to the integrity of the research findings (Tracy, 2010). This process also enabled recognition of any potential confirmation bias based on existing SFD and surf therapy literature including prior research and/or experience among the research team. Reflective audio was recorded by the lead researcher on site, and regular discussions within the research team were built into the data collection and analytical process. Communication was not always feasible while in Harper due to technical difficulties, but it was maintained where possible. One output of reflective practice was an extensive use of prompts and repeating statements back to participants to thoroughly understand their experiences of surfing. This ensured data remained focused on participant experiences as opposed to inferences based on established surfing culture or the preconceptions of the research team. This was of special importance given the growth of surfing within Harper since the sport's introduction in 2017 and the research team's position as cultural outsiders. The research team also included individuals with a broad range of surfing experience, which supported reflective discussion on potential predispositions. The lead researcher had initially encountered W4C while in South Africa and subsequently collaborated with them in the foundation of the International Surf Therapy Organization (ISTO) in 2017. Another important outcome of communication within the research team was ensuring the lead researcher maintained a role as critical researcher rather than as an advocate for W4C (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

Procedures

The study was designed in line with "basic qualitative study" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) due to the focus on understanding how participants made sense of their experiences at W4C. A purposive sample was utilized to ensure participants had in-depth experience of the W4C intervention. Sufficient variation of age, gender, and location was ensured in the sample to better understand core experiences within the intervention (Patton, 2015). Sampling occurred concurrent with data collection and

analysis. Children and youth who had taken part in W4C surf therapy for a minimum of six months were invited to take part in the study via the distribution of information sheets by W4C surf mentors. Consent forms were distributed to children and youth who expressed interest in participation. Parental consent was mandatory for all participants under the age of 18. Additional steps were taken to ensure participants were partaking voluntarily after some consent forms arrived back with only parent signatures. Participants were recruited from a range of local communities within Harper. Twenty-three participants were interviewed with an average age of 15.8 and an age range of 11-25 with a standard deviation of 3.6. The age range in the sample represents all W4C service users in Liberia. The gender makeup of the sample was representative of intervention participation with 74% male participants and 26% female participants. Given this gender breakdown, the research team was alert to potentially divergent experiences within data reported by female participants.

Twenty-three semistructured interviews were conducted during February 2019, with a mean interview time of 21 minutes (range 17-36 minutes). Younger participants typically had shorter interviews, which poses challenges, but it was deemed important to represent a full range of participant experiences. Interviews were conducted at locations and times that minimized disruption for participants. Locations consisted of private areas at the beach and a local health compound when the beach was judged too busy. Peer support, provided by W4C surf mentors, occurred in 70% of interviews. While W4C mentors' presence could have impacted interview content, it was considered an important step for participants under 18 to ensure access to appropriate, contextual, and trusted safeguarding support and to avoid researchers being alone with vulnerable child participants. Peer support was optional for participants over the age of 18, but all preferred to be interviewed individually. When present, the W4C mentors also helped with language challenges. While English is the first language in Liberia, the local dialect at times necessitated translator support. Before interviews, the lead researcher briefed W4C mentors involved on simple steps to minimize any feelings of coercion. This included how to deliver nonleading questions should translation be required and ensuring participants knew that everything shared was anonymous. W4C mentors agreed to confidentiality of all interview contents unless it impacted participant safety.

Interview procedures consisted of a brief introduction to ensure all participants understood the process: (a) that they were taking part voluntarily, (b) everything said would be treated confidentially unless it could impact participant safety, (c) all data included in write-up would be anonymous, and (d) they could stop or pause the interview at any time. It was also highlighted that there were no right or wrong answers. At the start and at the end of interviews, participants were given the chance to ask any questions about the process.

Interview Guide

The interview guide (see below) was developed to ensure thorough exploration of participant experiences through open-ended questions with a particular focus on theoretical mediators of surf therapy (Caddick, Phoenix et al., 2015; Caddick, Smith et al., 2015; Marshall, et al., 2020; Marshall et al., 2019). Probes, prompts or "exploration" (Seidman, 2013) were used to further interrogate experiences and encourage resonance and depth for subsequent analysis. This process also ensured participant meaning was clearly understood given local dialect and slang. After piloting the interview guide, two questions caused confusion and so were removed from later interviews. The first question omitted was too conceptual and the self-descriptions it generated were very literal. The second question omitted used a colloquial expression ("day-to-day") that did not retain its meaning in the local dialect. In line with the pragmatic and explorative approach of the study, new questions were added as initial analysis occurred to further explore participant perceptions and specific elements of the intervention. The interview guide is as follows (questions that were removed are struck through, while questions that were added during the study are in italics):

- Can you tell me about your time with W4C?
- Can you talk me through how you got involved with W4C?
- When you look to back your first-time surfing, are there any events that stand out in your mind?
- Can you tell me how you felt when you caught your first wave?
- Can you tell me how you feel at the beach and in the water?
- Can you tell me what it was like meeting with new people at the beach?
- Can you tell me about the atmosphere at the beach?
- *Can you tell me about [insert item from W4C Curriculum]?*

- *Can you tell me about bananas' culture?*
- ~~How would you describe yourself as a person at the beach?~~
- ~~How, if at all, has surfing impacted on your day-to-day life?~~
- Can you tell me what surfing now means to you?
- Can you tell me about working alongside the W4C surf mentors?
- Can you describe to me what you thought about surfing before you started? (Follow up: How, if at all have these changed?)
- Is there anything else you think I should know to understand the W4C?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me in relation to anything we have discussed?
- *Can you tell me what you would tell your friends about W4C if they did not know about it?*
- *Can you tell me what it means for you to be a surfer?*

Analysis

The lead researcher transcribed key segments with filler left on the audio in a process that was repeated throughout data collection and concurrent analysis. Analysis was conducted in an iterative, emergent, and nonlinear manner with constant comparison between participant data (Charmaz, 2014). Three stages of coding were utilized (initial, intermediate, and advanced) concurrently with data collection. The different stages of coding allowed for in-depth exploration and comparison of perceived intervention processes, which in turn highlighted individual impacts and outcomes. The third stage of analysis identified the storyline of participant experiences in order to map an initial W4C program theory and understand directionality between impacts and outcomes. Audio recordings were used as an alternative to memo writing throughout to support analysis. The lead researcher managed the study design process, collected data, and conducted analysis with support at all stages from the other members of the research team.

Methodological Rigor

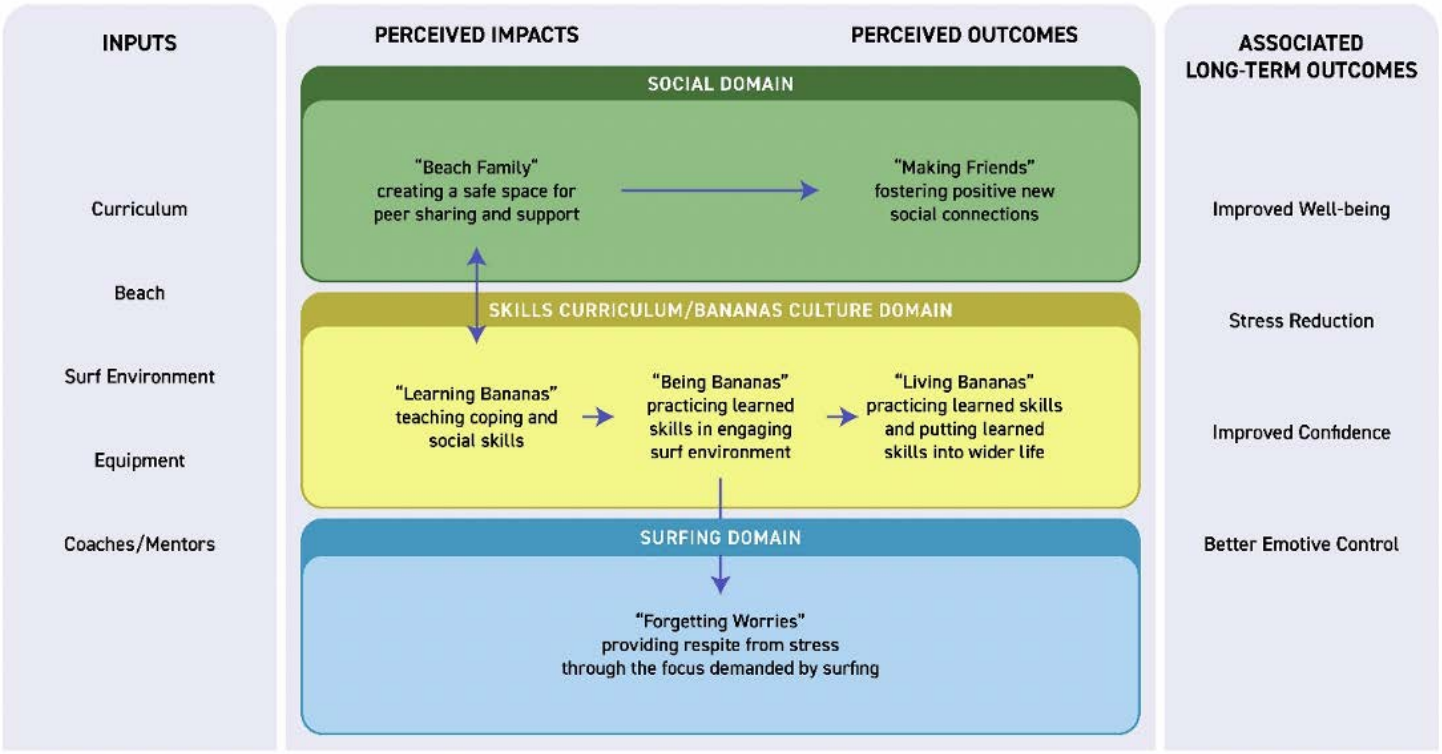
To enhance the rigor of data collection, several strategies were employed, including prolonged participatory engagement with the intervention, triangulation, and member checking (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Tracy, 2010). These strategies were identified as best suited to pragmatically promote rigor while avoiding a simplistic criteriological approach (Barbour, 2001; Smith & McGannon, 2018). For the month prior to and during data collection, the lead researcher established a role of observer-participant within W4C surf therapy. This involved taking part in surf therapy alongside a different cohort to participants involved in the study, joining W4C staff in preparation and debriefs from sessions, and joining weekly W4C team meetings. The lead researcher also held frequent informal discussions with W4C practitioners and local stakeholders, which built relationships within and around the intervention. This collaboration did not generate data in an ethnographic sense but supported multivocality and the interpretation of participants' experiences, especially with regards to the cultural differences between participants and the research team (Tracy, 2010). Member checking is a term that has been utilized with a variety of meanings within qualitative research (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) and has been criticized especially when utilized as a technical exercise (Smith & McGannon, 2018). In this study, member checking involved sharing interpretations with participants at initial analytical stages to enhance understanding and potentially generate new data. This method was especially important given cultural and linguistic differences between participants and researchers. The aim of this process was to enhance interpretation, rather than as a technical verification exercise and may be better described as "member reflection" (Tracy, 2010). These additional steps supported a rigorous, contextualized, and in-depth interpretation of participant experiences of the intervention.

RESULTS

An Initial Program Theory

A logic model visualizing perceived impacts and outcomes identified within W4C participant experiences in Liberia is shown in Figure 1. These impacts and outcomes have been labeled an initial program theory within the definition of program theory as a process (Vogel, 2012). It must be noted that this study was not designed to test long-term outcomes within the W4C intervention, and the four long-term outcomes listed are based on prior W4C evaluation conducted both in Liberia and South Africa. Six perceived impacts and outcomes were identified as integral to the W4C intervention and were grouped within three domains: Social, Skills Curriculum/Bananas Culture, and Surfing.

Figure 1. A logic model of initial program theory within Waves for Change in Liberia



Social Domain

"Beach Family": Creating a safe space for peer sharing and support

One of the key elements of the intervention identified by participants was the safe space that the coaches created and encouraged participants to support. This space was often likened to a family, with elements of both physical and emotional safety. Examples of participants speaking highly of their relationships with their coaches include:

"I feel good because my coaches can be around me, my surfing family make me feel good." (Participant 1)

"They (the coaches) are taking care of us like their own children, they never beat on us and they speak to us like sister and brother." (Participant 2)

The safe space is attributed to caring coaches who manage the "family" dynamic within the group. It is interesting to note that participants saw coaches as brothers and sisters as opposed to parental figures. This demonstrates the participatory style of teaching utilized to promote equity within the group and further reinforce the safe space.

Coaches also encouraged and continually reinforced a nonjudgmental attitude in the group that facilitated honesty and openness among participants. This lack of judgment further reinforced the safe space while challenging local stigma around the discussion of feelings and negative mental health. For example, Participant 3 noted, "If you want to ask for help you must not be ashamed, because when somebody is in trouble, they may be ashamed to ask for help." The ability to share openly also led to a communal approach to solving personal problems through coach and peer support. Participant 4 noted,

The easy way of me being able to share my feelings at Waves for Change, I see that Waves for Change is almost, I would like to say a family. We are a group of people and then Waves for Change is all about caring for people and to not see people go on the wrong side. I feel happy when I get a problem and am able to share it with them and together find a solution.

This safe space within the intervention is fundamental to the service delivery and associated outcomes while also supporting an effective learning environment for curriculum items.

"Making friends": Fostering new positive social connections

New positive social connections were frequently referenced within the W4C intervention. Many participants reported

their struggles to make such connections prior to taking part in the surf therapy intervention due to a reported lack of interaction among different communities and backgrounds within Harper. Participant 5 commented,

Waves for Change is an organization that brings many people together such as you see people coming together from different communities, that you don't know their background you just see them coming in. When you are here at Waves for Change you are able to organize new friends, to make new friends who are able to help you tomorrow.

These new relationships were developed through learned social skills contingent on the safe space, openness, and nonjudgmental attitude modeled within the intervention. These social skills were further reinforced within curriculum activities. Participant 6 shared,

The reason why Waves for Change make me feel fine is because I was not having friends and I not know how to find friends, but Waves for Change taught me how to find friends, how to talk to other people and how to respect people.

Another element that seems to have facilitated new relationships was being able to share in the fun activity of surfing:

Sharing fun in the water, while surfing I made new friends. (W4C Participant 1)

Surfing means sharing fun. (Participant 7)

Social skills learned within the intervention and the shared fun of surfing seem to have facilitated new and positive relationships. This differed from the negative social connections that participants reported prior to the intervention. Such negative relationships led to antisocial behaviors, crime, and violence in contrast to the positive relationships described within W4C. Participant 5 shared,

Whenever I go out with my friends [since W4C] and we are interacting on anything, like discussing our school matters, when we communicate, I listen and when communicating, we respect each other's views.

New social connections were important for participants due to (a) their positive nature, (b) their basis in shared learning and surfing experience, and (c) their disregard for differences in community or background. These positive social connections, enabled by the effective safe space within the intervention, offer a clear pathway to associated intervention outcomes.

Skills Curriculum/Bananas Culture Domain

"Learning Bananas": Teaching coping and social skills

The W4C curriculum, as discussed previously, is centered on evidence-based exercises designed to build skills that support and maintain positive well-being. Each curriculum item was not individually interrogated given their evidence-based development but looked at as a whole with respect to participant perceptions of impacts and outcomes. Young participants highlighted how skills within the curriculum are the priority for the intervention, over and above the sporting element:

The main thing (you learn) is how to manage your anger, because whenever somebody trigger you and you want to take action. If you go to Waves for Change and then you have that trigger, anger, Waves for Change will teach you the techniques to say, to be cool down. It will be better to know how to manage your anger and avoid trouble. (Participant 4)

For the above participant, the most important element of their surf therapy experience was learning to better regulate emotions like anger. The initial teaching of these skills was done through activities that explained and demonstrated skills before giving participants a chance to try. Participant 2 explained,

Immersion is the act of communication. Immersion means when we hold each other and go into the water. As we go into the water, we ask each other about their feelings. If someone is not happy, we all turn around to respect the person's feelings. It is part of the banana culture.

While the immersion activity is focused on introducing participants to a new aquatic environment, the key teaching points are related to respecting each other's feelings and communication. This participant demonstrates their understanding of the teaching points alongside how activities were not framed as curriculum, but as a culture inherent to intervention participation: "Bananas is our culture, it means respect, protect and communicate. It means love and care" (Participant 8).

The culture was identified as the "Bananas Culture" in reference to a popular surfing hand gesture (the shaka), which was deemed to resemble a banana by W4C participants. The definition of curriculum activities as part of an intervention culture seems to have given meaning and value to learned skills over and above benefits participants

may have felt. Participant 7 commented, "If you are stressed or worried in your mind you can easily tell somebody the way you are feeling and it is being bananas to tell somebody." This participant describes a learned behavior from the curriculum activities as normalized and meaningful because it is part of the Bananas Culture they identify with. This example is of note due to the significant amount of local stigma that existed around being open and honest with feelings and mental health. The social and coping skills within curriculum activities were (a) prioritized over sporting activities; (b) taught in an explanative, demonstrative, and participatory manner; and (c) identified as integral to an intervention culture that resonated with participants.

"Being Bananas": Practicing learned skills in an engaging surf environment

The teaching of key W4C social and coping skills was combined with their practice and reinforcement within aquatic and surfing activities. As one participant highlighted it was an important combination of learned theory and practice:

You have the theory and the practical, so the theory is protect, respect, and communicate and the practical like immersion (an aquatic activity) is where we demonstrate the theoretical aspect. Like communicating with your friends, you hold their hand in the water to protect them and in the water, you respect their view. (Participant 9)

The combination of learned skills and behaviors with surfing allowed for practice of learned skills within a real-world situation, such as when a participant fell off their board:

There was a time when I was in the waves and a wave break over me and I fell in the water. I take my take five [coping skill] and I get back on the board and release all the stress on my mind. (W4C Participant 6)

The naturally induced emotional and physiological responses experienced when falling under the water offer a real situation in which to practice learned skills with the safety net of coach and peer support. This safety net must be delivered effectively by attentive coaches. The reality of these situations could lead to negative emotions and/or experiences, which in turn could lead to disengagement from the intervention or reduced well-being. No participants reported such a situation, but it was not possible to interview any participants who had disengaged, so it cannot be ruled out. While skills are initially taught in a participatory manner, the natural challenges of the surf environment in which participants get to practice them further entrenches skillsets.

The use of learned skills within the surf environment is also reinforced through praise from coaches and other participants as part of the Bananas Culture. Again, the positives of defining the curriculum as a culture are highlighted in maintaining the prioritization of coping and social skills within the sporting elements of the intervention. Participants described how their identities as surfers were not defined by their success standing on a surfboard but in how effectively they lived out the core elements of Bananas Culture. Participant 10 commented,

If I am a surfer, I would learn how to shelter each other, I would learn how to communicate with each other and how to protect each other. Once I am on top of the water, I will be able to surf better because everything is fine to me.

The continued prioritization of learned coping and social skills within the sporting elements of W4C further entrenched curriculum learnings. This was achieved through the practice of learned skills to manage real emotional and physiological responses in the surf and further reinforce the Bananas Culture within a fun and engaging sporting context.

"Living Bananas": Putting learned skills into practice in wider life

The teaching and reinforcement of coping and social skills as part of W4C's Bananas Culture and surfing activities seem to have led to behavior change that affected participants outside of the intervention, at home and in the community. Participant 8 noted,

When you go home, all the things you learn at Waves for Change you must apply them in the home. When you apply them at home your parents will start praising you saying you are doing good things.

Participants reported effective use of positive behaviors and coping skills within wider life that provide a pathway to associated W4C outcomes (e.g., improved well-being, stress reduction, and better emotive control). Participant 11 stated, "When my friends are fighting, I will show them the bananas sign and they will stop fighting." The use of the Bananas gesture in a conflict resolution situation further highlights the success of reinforcing skills through a cultural definition. These skills seem to have been entrenched and valued enough that participants also discussed their willingness to share what they learned at the intervention with the wider community:

If you have that culture in you, you not only have it at the beach. But if you go out, if you want to do something bad, you will think about the bananas culture, the bananas rules and it will make you to stop. So, it is not only for the beach but for the home. It is there to educate you and so your neighbors and your household can learn. (Participant 4)

Within this specific example, the participant explains how they have become a conduit of W4C learnings within their family and local community.

Surfing Domain

"Forgetting Worries": Providing respite from stress through the focus demanded by surfing

One aspect of the W4C intervention that participants consistently highlighted was a sense of respite from stress, negative thoughts, and emotions that surfing and taking part in water activities enabled:

I feel happy when I surf because it takes stress from my mind. (Participant 3)

The surfing is great, the surfing helps to clean down the stress on the mind. (Participant 6)

The fact that participants focused on surfing as a chance to relieve stress highlights the lack of opportunities to experience such respite within a challenging post-conflict environment. Such respite provides a clear pathway to intervention outcomes such as stress reduction and improved well-being. Participants frequently emphasized a potential mechanism for this sense of respite in the form of the complete focus that surfing demands:

My focus is on the wave that I ride. (Participant 10)

Because when I am surfing, I am always focused on the board, I don't think about anything else. That's how I focus, I focus just on the board. Maybe after I am surfing, I have other things in my mind, but while I am surfing, I do not think about anything else just the board. (Participant 12)

The focus demanded by surfing, on what the wave is doing, or controlling the board, seems to have overridden prior negative emotions enabling a sense of respite. Participants reported how there was not space in their thoughts for anything else:

Surfing you are laughing and happy, you are enjoying the wave you gonna be laughing and smiling and it takes stress from your mind. You not be thinking about anything else. (Participant 13)

The focus reported as inherent to surfing provides a theoretical pathway to feelings of respite reported within the intervention and subsequent W4C outcomes such as stress reduction or improved well-being.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The initial conceptualization of W4C program theory based on participant experiences in Liberia offers insight and implications for the intervention, for surf therapy, and for the wider SFD paradigm. Foundational to this initial W4C program theory was the effective creation of a safe space within the intervention, which aligns with stakeholder consultation conducted at the intervention design stage (Benninger & Savahl, 2016). The importance of safe spaces has been previously highlighted within surf therapy in different contexts (Marshall et al., 2020; Marshall et al., 2019), in wider SFD literature (Spaaij & Schulenkorf, 2014), and within post-conflict settings (Mahr & Campbell, 2016). The creation of safe spaces has also been emphasized in the development of best practices for a holistic approach to safeguarding children and youth in sport. (Rhind et al., 2017). The focus on a safe space and how it facilitated open sharing and the delivery of coping skills is comparable to other effective contextualized community-based mental health interventions for youth within the LMICs (Barry et al., 2013). Integral to this safe space were coach behaviors that mirror recommendations around the use of caring adults within PYD through sport (Camiré, 2014). While the use of safe spaces and caring adults have been previously identified as a priority for W4C delivery, these findings confirm them as important mediators within initial program theory. These elements are especially important in post-conflict settings where negative well-being has been linked to the collapse of protective communal, family, and societal structures (Borba et al., 2016). The safe space provided by the intervention offers an alternative or supplemental protective societal structure within a context where such structures are severely lacking. A recent review of mental health services in Liberia found only one clinical psychiatrist available to support a population of approximately 4.7 million people (World Health Organization, 2017). While further contributing to the evidence base around the importance of safe spaces within SFD and PYD through sport, this study also highlights key elements that enable safe space provision such as a nonjudgmental focus and equity between participants and coaches. Further exploration of this process

in isolation would be an important element in the development of a comprehensive program theory. The importance of a nonjudgmental and equitable approach to holding a safe space within an intervention is a valuable finding that can inform future intervention design in a contextually sensitive manner (Spaaij & Schulenkorf, 2014).

Alongside the establishment of a safe space, the importance of bolstering social connections, support, and cohesion is well established in PYD (Holt et al., 2017), post-conflict (Bosqui & Marshoud, 2018), and surf therapy (Benninger et al., 2020) paradigms. This study further supports existing evidence around the importance of social elements of intervention design. The study also explores how specific mediators such as safe spaces, taught communication skills and sharing in a fun activity facilitate bolstering of social connections. The establishment of positive relationships married to positive behaviors and values at W4C provides a pathway to longer term social and human capital (Bailey et al., 2013). These relationships may also contribute to protective and positive social support, the breakdown of which has been previously discussed in relation to post-conflict settings (Borba et al., 2016). While this paper is focused on participant perceptions of impacts and outcomes, the links to social capital present a new potential long-term outcome that W4C could explore within its ongoing measurement and evaluation. Furthermore, these steps enabled W4C in Harper to bring participants together from different communities who would not normally socialize together. In depth investigation of this within W4C in South Africa could be a potential research priority given integration of multiple diverse communities and ethnicities at South African intervention sites.

In addition to the discussion of social domains, the current study builds on evidence that the "plus sport" model (Coalter, 2009) provides the most effective framework for SFD intervention design and implementation. The plus sport model highlights the need for sport to be subservient to other processes and outcomes at intervention design. An often-romanticized notion of the power of sport (Coalter, 2013) has led to SFD often being viewed as intrinsically beneficial without any consideration of how sport is structured or delivered. When this view is taken and program theory is not given sufficient consideration, SFD can have negative impacts on the population it is supposed to serve (Richards et al., 2014). In contrast, this study found that W4C utilized the sport of surfing as a vehicle to support nonsporting theoretical mediators in achieving its associated long-term outcomes. Surfing's suitability as a vehicle for SFD in Harper was highlighted, combining well with social and skill-based domains. Of note was the intervention's ability to create and hold a safe space for participants from a range of different communities, ages, and genders within a sporting context. This aligns with wider discussions of the suitability of action sports within SFD and PYD, especially given their less competitive focus on individual improvement and achievement, while allowing participants of different skill levels or capabilities to take part within the same space (Thorpe, 2014). Further research into the theoretical mediators and suitability of action sports as vehicles for SFD and PYD would be beneficial to inform future intervention design and optimization, especially given the dominance of traditional team-based sport within the paradigm (Schulenkorf et al., 2016; Svensson & Woods, 2017). The effective use of surfing as a vehicle for mental health outcomes seems to have avoided negative stigma that was evident locally and is well documented in West Africa (Esan et al., 2014; Gureje, et al., 2005). This evasion of negative stigma highlights another benefit to an effective plus sport approach. The impacts and outcomes explored in this study offers a replicable example of how to effectively deliver plus sport SFD while adding to the discussion around action sports as vehicles for SFD and PYD.

In line with the plus sport model, the W4C skill-based curriculum presented an overt focus on skills that provided pathways through to associated intervention outcomes. The intervention utilized mediators that could be identified from a range of existing life-skill transfer through sport models including the use of caring adults and a safe space (Camiré, 2014; Gould & Carson, 2008; Holt et al., 2017; Petitpas et al., 2005; Pierce et al., 2017). Where the W4C approach aligned with a more specific model is its clear focus on successful transfer of learned skills. The definition of the curriculum as a "culture" aligned with the Model of Sport-Based Life Skills Transfer created by Pierce et al. (2017) that includes elements highlighted in this study such as social support, meaningfulness for participants, and personal reconstruction. The same model highlights the importance of opportunities to use skills and similarity of context for transfer, matching with participant data around using learned skills in the face of real emotional and physiological responses in the surf environment. This approach seems to have led to entrenched transfer of W4C coping and social skills that participants reported using personally and in their community. It must be noted this "culture" approach to transfer may have been facilitated by the lack of extant surf culture in Harper. Attempting the same approach for another sport with an established culture such as soccer could be more challenging. The alignment of initial W4C program theory mediators with specific models and metafindings in life-skill transfer through sport adds credence to the intervention's claims. The Model of

Sport-Based Life Skills Transfer (Pierce et al., 2017) should be integrated within future W4C training and development. It can also provide a framework for both a more comprehensive W4C program theory and wider future surf therapy intervention development.

In addition to the importance of skill transfer, this study explored how the inherent focus demanded by surfing enabled a sense of respite from negative emotions, feelings, and stress. This focus demanded by surfing has previously been highlighted in other studies with different geographical and cultural contexts (Caddick, Phoenix et al., 2015; Caddick, Smith et al., 2015; Marshall et al., 2019; Marshall et al., 2020). Given the novelty of the sport in Harper, this pathway also seems specifically tied to the action of surfing rather than any cultural associations that may exist due to external factors such as tourism, sports trends, or local sporting role models. A study by Whitley et al. (2018) exploring systems theory for sport-based PYD in traumatized and disadvantaged youth labeled this focus "forced mindfulness," which correlates with participant experiences in this study. Whitley et al. (2018) also linked this focus to physicality and competition based on the type of sports involved, which contrasts with the individual action sport utilized by W4C. These findings suggest that focus demanded by sport can enable respite or escapism across different modalities of SFD and PYD. This respite or escapism has also been linked with improved mental well-being for individuals who have experienced multiple traumas or adverse conditions (Massey & Williams, 2020), supporting this pathway within an initial W4C program theory. It must be noted that this respite is a short-term relief and exposure stressors will return as children and youth leave the intervention environment, stressors that W4C and other SFD programs may not be able to ameliorate. When discussing focus within surfing, participants also reported key indicators of flow states including complete involvement, temporal distortion, sense of serenity, and a sense of ecstasy (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002) when discussing feelings of respite. Flow theory suggests a mental state involving complete immersion, focus, and intrinsic enjoyment within an activity, colloquially known as being "in the zone." The possibility of flow states being present within surf therapy interventions has been previously suggested (Marshall et al., 2020) alongside other sport-based therapies (Ley et al., 2017). The presence of flow states offers a novel potential mechanism for, albeit temporary, respite from negative thoughts or emotions and toward improved mental health. Given the prerequisites for flow states are well established, this is a significant finding that can inform appropriate modalities or structures of sport delivery to encourage respite within SFD. This novel pathway should be a future research priority with the presence of flow states being empirically tested within SFD and surf therapy contexts.

This novel finding around focus and respite also had practical implications for W4C service delivery. Participants reported that, from their own point of view, they did not always get enough time to surf in sessions. While joining W4C surf therapy sessions in Harper, the lead researcher did note that if sessions were shortened or delayed for any reason, the area that would be first cut back was the surfing time. The study findings suggest that the time allocated to surfing both supported curriculum skill transfer and provided opportunities for respite. After discussion of the research findings with practitioners in Liberia, surfing time within the intervention is now better protected to ensure these positive benefits. Highlighting surfing's use as a vehicle for delivering therapeutic elements rather than as a fun add-on represented a significant change in Liberian practitioners' approach. Furthermore, following discussion of this finding with W4C management, surfing time has been similarly protected across intervention sites in South Africa given the plausibility of similar theoretical mediators.

The exploratory program theory identified in W4C Liberia has supported expansion of surf therapy to another comparable post-conflict setting. Identified theoretical mediators have been included in training delivered to five youth organizations in Sierra Leone that wished to add surf therapy to their service delivery. The ongoing Wave Alliance initiative (www.waves-for-change.org/the-wave-alliance) utilizes the findings of this study alongside open sourcing of curriculum items and mentoring on elements of intervention delivery such as staff recruitment, evaluation, and fundraising to support other grassroots SFD projects. It is important to note this process is not prescriptive and successful integration of new contextual curriculum items has been observed. The project includes ongoing evaluation contributing to a reflective, critical, and honest theory of change process (Vogel, 2012) alongside continuing investigation into the transferability of surf therapy program theory (Smith, 2018).

Limitations

The lead researcher ensured that prior conceptualizations of mental health did not impact this pragmatic qualitative study. This was addressed by development of a working understanding of local concepts of mental health and personal well-being after arriving in Liberia, drawing on a priori reading and reflective practice. The research team held conversations with health organizations in Harper where possible, but given the dearth of local mental health

service provision these opportunities were limited. Despite these steps, acclimatization took time, as demonstrated by the exclusion of elements of the original interview guide. Mental health and well-being for Liberian youth focused on positive functioning as opposed to in-depth conceptual constructs around feelings matching with findings from comparable contexts (Glozah, 2015). This focus on mental health as it relates to positive functioning, while not a primary finding of this study, could prove a useful consideration for future research carried out within this context.

The presence of W4C mentors in 70% of interviews means data could have been influenced by third parties. Participants may not have wished to report honestly or openly with W4C mentors present due to the potential for repercussions or future exclusion from the surf club. Mentor presence was desirable for safeguarding reasons, and steps were taken to reduce potential coercion as listed above. While the most in-depth interviews were provided by older participants who did not have W4C mentors present, the correlation between findings with and without W4C mentors present suggests coercion mitigation strategies were successful. The in-depth involvement of W4C staff in the study allowed for observation and learning that could benefit future local evaluation.

One unavoidable element of this research was the lead researcher's position as a cultural, ethnic, and linguistic outsider to research participants in Liberia. Research has suggested that this can lead to issues around trust and rapport building with participants (Shariff, 2014). There was also a potential for response bias as participants may have worried about their data having negative consequences for intervention staff or structure. Clear steps were taken to mitigate for these issues, namely prolonged engagement with W4C in Harper and the prioritization of sincerity, honesty, and transparency about the study, its motives, and the lead researcher's background (Hill & Dao, 2020). Despite these steps the potential limitations due to the outsider status of the lead researcher and its potential impact on the study must be recognized.

CONCLUSION

This study was a pragmatic exploration of participant-perceived impacts and outcomes to develop an initial program theory within the W4C surf therapy intervention in a post-conflict setting. Interpreted findings were visualized in a logic model highlighting participant perceptions of psychological and social mediators within the intervention. While the scope of this study did not allow for the development of a comprehensive program theory, program theory is both a process and a product (Vogel, 2012), and this initial and contextual exploration provides a valuable step in this process. The prioritization of a plus sport (Coalter, 2009) model combined with an effective safe space and supported socialization opportunities highlighted best practice for the wider sport for mental health and development paradigms. W4C participant experiences of life-skill transfer and development of a "culture" to do so aligned with, supported, and provided a worked example of a specific model of skill transfer in sport literature (Pierce, et al., 2017). The study made contributions to discussions around respite or escapism within SFD and PYD especially in the possible identification of flow theory as a novel theoretical mediator. The findings also contributed to service optimization within W4C and have provided an initial and contextual framework to support proliferation of surf therapy services within neighboring Sierra Leone. Finally, the study contributed to greater understanding of the surf therapy paradigm, exploring surf therapy in a post-conflict environment for the first time.

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Original Research

Youth, "waithood," and social change: Sport, mentoring, and empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa

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ABSTRACT

The transition from youth to adulthood in African nations has changed markedly in recent years. Social and economic challenges often lead to the creation of a disengaged and alienated generation struggling to participate actively in society. Drawing on the personalized accounts of a group of youth leaders experiencing such conditions, this paper presents empirical findings from a small-scale qualitative study of one Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) initiative that, through various community-based projects, aims to provide personal, social, and educational support for young people in Mzuzu, a city in northern Malawi. The paper seeks to uncover some of the reasons behind youth disengagement within this particular context and explores how empowerment-based mentoring is used by youth leaders to bring about change in the lives of the young people with whom they work. The paper concludes that amid the wider tensions and anxieties of youth transition in sub-Saharan Africa, strategic and intentional relationship building (through mentoring) can provide a catalyst for personal development, intergenerational connection, and social change.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely accepted that the transition from youth to adulthood in African nations has changed markedly in recent years with the disappearance of traditional cultural pathways such as marriage, education, and other symbolic rituals and customs (Dhillon and Yousef, 2007; Singerman, 2007). Processes of modernization and globalization have meant that young people increasingly migrate to urban centers for schooling and/or employment, while at the same time social and economic policies imposed by financial institutions from the global north have reduced the power of African states to control their own economies (Hondwana, 2013). As a result, trade barriers that once protected local communities have been abolished, and shortcomings in local governance and leadership have done little to shore up wider infrastructural frailties (Manji 1998; Manji, 2011). These factors have negatively impacted access to jobs and related skills leaving many young people feeling socially marginalized, disengaged, and powerless (Chinguta et al., 2005; DeJaeghere and Baxter, 2014).

This paper presents empirical findings from a small-scale qualitative study of one Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) initiative—Sporting Nations—a venture based in the United Kingdom that, through various community projects, aims to provide educational support for young people in Mzuzu, a city in northern Malawi. The paper seeks to uncover some of the reasons behind youth disengagement within this particular context and explores how empowerment-based mentoring might be used to bring about change in the lives of disenfranchised youth.

SDP initiatives have long featured on Africa's cultural

Keywords: youth transition; sports-based mentoring; empowerment; social change; qualitative research

landscape and have attracted a significant amount of attention. In his critical account of SDP initiatives between 2000 and 2010, Mwaanga (2010) scrutinizes the philosophical underpinnings and subsequent leadership approaches commonly deployed by such initiatives and draws attention to the pitfalls in play. His enquiry reveals that during this period many projects were under-funded and poorly planned and coordinated. Both Giulianotti (2011) and Hartmann and Kwauk (2011) characterize many of these initiatives as using top-down approaches, often implemented by agents from the global north in a way that reinforces inequalities (see also Giulianotti et al., 2019; Lindsey, 2017). Further studies of global SDP projects have questioned the pedagogical approaches (including mentoring) used in such initiatives. This paper locates mentoring as a specific mechanism by which to engage and empower young people.

YOUTH, "WAITHOOD," AND MENTORING IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Social categories have been increasingly utilized to identify youth as an area of particular interest in recent African-based research (De Boeck & Hondwana, 2005). The concept of "waithood" is a prominent example. As a means of articulating youth experience, waithood was first conceptualized by Dhillon and Yousef (2007) and Singerman (2007) and has been further developed by Hondwana (2013), who describes it as a "portmanteau term" portraying "the period of suspension between childhood and adulthood, in which young people are unable to find employment, get married, and establish their own families" (p. 4). Hondwana (2013) goes on to note the disappearance of traditional transitions to adulthood in many African countries that, she argues, have "gradually been eroded by urbanization, modernization and globalization, as youths increasingly migrate to urban centres for schooling or employment" (p. 23). This process of "erosion," appears to have been caused by a convergence of factors including social and economic policies imposed by financial institutions from the global north that have reduced the power of African states to control their own economies. As a result, trade barriers designed to protect local producers have been abolished, and poor local governance and self-serving leadership styles have added complexities and challenges (see Manji, 1998; Manji, 2011). These factors have resulted in high unemployment and severe limitations on the ability of youth to attain opportunities normally associated with adulthood, including access to education and career pathways. Such processes have left many young people feeling socially marginalized and powerless (see Chinguta et al., 2005; DeJaeghere & Baxter, 2014).

Over the same period there has been a more widespread rise in the use of mentoring across social, political, cultural, and economic contexts in order to bolster the identities of young people (see Aitken, 2014; Dubois et al., 2011; Dubois & Karcher, 2014a; Tolan et al., 2013). That said, these developments have not always been informed by best practice or clarity of definition (Colley, 2002; Clutterbuck, 2014) and this, in turn, has resulted in an ever-widening repertoire of mentor skills. Dubois and Karcher (2014b) have challenged conventional definitions of mentoring that focus exclusively on the characteristics of the mentor and their relationship with mentees proposing instead an altogether more differentiated view of youth mentoring that encompasses "governmental, political/policy, dimensions, organizational interventions within specific youth communities" (p. 4). In this way, Dubois and Karcher (2014b) argue that mentoring should not been seen in isolation from wider cultural practices.

When considering the youth mentoring process in Malawi, a further level of complexity is involved since within this context, "youth" is a highly contested term. For example, Hondwana (2013) notes that a wide age range is encompassed in definitions of youth within sub-Saharan Africa and suggests that those definitions based purely on biological maturation do not do justice to the relational, cultural, and social phenomena that influence the way that the concept is experienced and interpreted. In turn, she notes how the influence of social media has increased frustrations among young people in relation to their awareness of the limitations of their social and economic circumstances in comparison to those in other countries. These factors often interrelate to negatively influence mentoring relationships by presenting mentors with challenges around managing the life course expectations of mentees.

One form of mentoring relationship that has emerged as particularly effective with young people facing potentially disempowering circumstances (i.e., exclusion from education, and/or unemployment and homelessness) is informal (or natural) mentoring (see Greeson et al., 2015). According to James et al. (2015), informal mentoring offers all of the traditional benefits associated with formal mentorship (i.e., access to broader networks of personal support and accountability and increased social capital) but does not require specific goal setting, long-term commitment, or hierarchical position. Self-nomination (i.e., the selection of a mentor by the mentee from their wider network) is identified by Thompson et al. (2016) as a key component of these natural mentoring relationships (see also Schwartz et al., 2013; Spencer et al., 2016). Indeed, these relationships may have already been established, and

as a consequence of their organic formation, the bond between mentor and mentee may well be stronger and more enduring as a result. According to Dang and Miller (2013), the support made available through such relationships makes natural mentoring attractive to homeless youth, since their socially marginalized status increases the possibility of isolation and related challenges. Greeson et al. (2015) indicate the particular benefits of informal/natural mentoring for young people who struggle to develop healthy connections with others and may, in some cases, have experienced caregiver maltreatment. The unique qualities required to compensate for past negative life-course events include sustained, close and meaningful relationships that are characteristic of informal mentoring approaches (see Meltzer et al., 2018; Pryce, 2012; Spencer et al., 2010).

Youth Mentoring and Empowerment

As we have seen, a combination of socio-economic factors has contributed to the emergence of the waithood generation in sub-Saharan Africa. This generation struggles to gain adult status and, with this, the socially recognized personal value that accompanies adulthood in the spheres of work, education, and politics (Blatterer, 2010). According to Hondwana (2013), young people in waithood often feel rejected and overlooked by their elders and are presented with few, if any, opportunities to express their views. In her survey of literature from selected African countries, Kang'ethe (2014) claims that in many of these patriarchal societies, youth are treated in a condescending way. This attitude can have a detrimental impact on the assertiveness, confidence, autonomy, and future aspirations of young people, and this, in turn, may inhibit citizenship participation (Donald & Clacherty 2005). Amid such circumstances, it is not uncommon for parents to simply view young people as "agents of economic production," an approach that often results in youth being sent out to work to provide for wider familial needs and, as a consequence, foregoing personal development opportunities via educational pathways.

Hondwana (2013) suggests that as a result of these wider circumstances, it is common for young people to become politically disillusioned and isolated to the extent that they do not exercise their right to vote. In turn, they feel that governments fail to respond even to their basic needs let alone their longer-term aspirations. In addition, many young people are frustrated by widespread corruption in politics and commerce, sensing that politicians seek to gain votes through manipulation, promising change without the intention of fulfilling their obligations. Likewise, young people discern a lack of good leadership and role models (Hondwana, 2013. Dawson (2014) argues that in Johannesburg and across South Africa, youth who have borne the brunt of the job and housing crisis have more recently been associated with militant protests subsequently being portrayed as dangerous, militant, and angry.

It has been argued that empathy, trust, and rapport building are central to the establishment of relationships in mentoring (Garvey, 2016), and such practices can be especially significant in youth mentoring scenarios (see DuBois & Karcher, 2014a, 2014b; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). However, it seems that the waithood generation struggle to trust those in positions of authority. Indeed, it would be fair to assume that young people may well hesitate to seek mentoring from a generation by whom they feel manipulated and neglected. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that there is relatively little research evidence of youth mentoring for empowerment in sub-Saharan Africa. The low status of youth coupled with large numbers of people caught betwixt and between youth and adulthood (and the tensions therein) are not ideal social conditions in which to promote the growth of adult-initiated youth interactions. Though youth mentoring should not be conceived of exclusively in terms of an adult-to-youth relationship, the escalating conflict between generations would seem to severely restrict potential for mentoring of any kind (Karcher, 2014).

Drawing on ideas derived from community psychology (CP) (see Nelson & Prillentenksky, 2010) and positive youth development (PYD) (see Larson, 2006), Laing et al. (2013) propose a move toward social transformative objectives for youth mentoring, suggesting the use of the youth-adult partnership model). According to Benson (2003), the PYD approach is a reaction against deficit models of intervention starting from the premise that all young people have assets and the capacity to change. Here the focus is on building on the strengths of the young mentee with the mentor aiming to identify existing qualities. PYD mentoring also involves the recognition of "shared strengths" so that there is mutual benefit, for example, with other young people in the mentee's community (Lerner, 2004). These shared strengths are often referred to as "developmental assets" (Benson et al., 2006). By improving these natural competencies, this approach aims to prepare young people to be active participants in civil society. Kang'ethe (2014) endorses this perspective and delineates a range of areas in which youth in sub-Saharan Africa have strengths that are not possessed by the older generation. These include active growing minds that enable them to adapt to new technological developments (which, in turn, enable them to be more globally aware) and an increased awareness of and open-ness to geographical mobility (i.e.,

their ability to move to find new economic opportunities). As Hondwana (2013) notes,

Young people in waithood are not passively waiting for their lives to change. They know that existing socio economic systems have no place for them and are actively engaged in finding solutions to their problems by seizing any possible openings and trying to make something of their lives. (p. 87)

For young people in challenging situations, informal/natural mentoring in sporting contexts has been shown to offer beneficial outcomes (see Morgan & Parker, 2017; Morgan et al., 2019; Parker et al., 2018; Parker et al., 2019).[1] In the United States, Greeson et al. (2015), point to the way in which those who had been let down by their biological parents experienced a rebuilding of trust because of the faithful attributes of natural mentors with young people reporting that the "family like" love, affection, and security provided by these relationships created a sense of permanence. This was especially so if time was given for the relationship to mature. Dang and Miller (2013) state that similar views have been expressed by homeless youth, many of whom find it easier to disclose private feelings to natural mentors than to anyone else. As a result, natural mentoring relationships may confer particular benefits for homeless youth populations given that they lack the adult and community support available to their "housed" peers. Others have reported assistance with mental health issues and an increased sense of social connectedness as a result of informal or natural mentoring (see Dang and Miller, 2013; Rew, 2008).

RESEARCH CONTEXT

As noted above, the empirical findings featured here are drawn from a Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) initiative called "Sporting Nations," which is financed and structured around a shared learning dialogue between community stakeholders and SDP project coordinators in Malawi and students and staff from a provincial university in the United Kingdom. Originally conceived in 2009 as a result of a link between the university and a faith-based organization in Malawi, the project is delivered via annual, month-long (May-June) visits to Mzuzu (the capital of the country's northern region), where practical, sports-based workshops and mentoring are delivered and facilitated by team of UK-based students and staff (project workers) to engage and empower youth leaders (aged 18-30) in their work with local young people (who they mentor). Workshops are structured around the delivery of sports familiar to and popular among Malawian youth such as soccer, tennis, netball, and volleyball and are delivered at a recreational level at the University of Mzuzu and various schools and public sports venues. Project workers lead the delivery of workshops with the aim of demonstrating a range of teaching and coaching methods to youth leaders who observe and co-lead thereby gaining experience in the use of these methods. The aims of the project are two-fold: (1) to provide personal, social, and educational support for these youth leaders in relation to their engagement and mentoring of young people in their own communities, and (2) to provide additional training for these leaders in how to use sport as a relational starting point for a range of educational activities, including community development and gender awareness and the teaching of entrepreneurial and leadership skills to the young men and women with whom they work. Youth leaders use sport as a way of engaging with young people socially and educationally in different catchment areas of Mzuzu. These young people are 8-20 years old and range from the comparatively affluent (i.e., those still living with birth parents and who are in mainstream education) to those experiencing significant life challenges (e.g., extreme poverty, parental neglect, educational exclusion, and street vending).

At the same time, the project provides work placement and professional development opportunities for the university students concerned, all of whom are self-funded and recruited from undergraduate academic courses (at the host university) in related disciplinary areas, (i.e., sport development, sport studies, sport education). The academic staff involved in the organization and delivery of the project are drawn from these disciplinary areas as well as wider disciplines (i.e., youth work, social work) and all have established relationships with key agencies (faith-based and otherwise) and stakeholders in Mzuzu and beyond. In turn, staff work closely year round with project coordinators in order to provide personal support through on-going dialogue and to maintain alignment between the overall aims of the project and the specific needs of each of the communities in which it is embedded. While the involvement of traditional stakeholder groups (i.e., chiefs, church leaders, educators, and families) is central to this on-going dialogue, this paper focuses specifically on data gathered with youth leaders in order to facilitate their (often unheard and undocumented) voices in relation to their experiences of working with disenfranchised young people.

METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

The research was driven by a constructionist ontology and interpretive epistemology with the aim of eliciting the subjective interpretations of the everyday lives of youth leaders in relation to their participation in and experiences of the various elements of the Sporting Nations project

(Bryman, 2015). The empirical findings presented are drawn from a wider research study that sought to investigate the impact of mentoring on the development of youth leadership across the community locations where the project is delivered. This wider investigation represented a longer-term (three-year) monitoring and evaluation process that sought to assess the extent to which the project had been successful in its overall aims. Data for this wider investigation were generated via a range of methods comprising semistructured interviews, focus groups, observations of Sporting Nations activities and workshops, and informal conversations with project respondents, participants, and stakeholders. The data on display here are taken from a selection of one-to-one semistructured interviews with the three project coordinators who have oversight of the organization and delivery of the initiative across the various regions of Mzuzu, and focus group interviews (n=4) with youth leaders who attended workshops run by the UK-based project workers. The three project coordinators also took part in the focus groups. These interviews have been chosen because they were specifically designed to explore issues surrounding youth mentoring. Each of the project coordinators were known to the UK project workers, as were a selection of the youth leader interviewees who had been project participants in previous years. Although the three project coordinators were known to many of the youth leaders involved in the overall project, they worked specifically with (and mentored) only those from their particular region.

Sampling Procedure

The sample for one-to-one interviews was self-selecting given that all three project coordinators took part in the study. Youth leader focus group participants were purposively selected from the wider population of youth leaders involved in the Sporting Nations project. Each of the four focus groups comprised eight members, and this number included the project coordinators, one of whom attended the first two groups, the other two attending the latter two groups. Hence, the total number of respondents who took part in the featured interviews and focus groups was 29. Sampling took into account age, gender, and socioeconomic status in order to obtain a wide variety of perspectives from the respondent cohort (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Group membership was composed in such a way that it provided a balance between diversity and similarity to ensure the generation of stimulating and supportive dialogue (Brown, 1995; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Focus groups were mixed gender but only two participants were female, and this sense of disproportionality reflected the overall complexion of the project in terms of youth leader respondents. There was an awareness that some focus groups contained a mixture of project coordinators and their youth leader mentees and that this might potentially inhibit open discussion. However, having considered the dynamics of the two groups and the established working relationships that existed between them, the decision was taken to bring together both participant cohorts, and this facilitated a series of highly open and constructive discussions. In terms of socioeconomic background, all three project coordinators were in their late 20s to early 30s and may be described as moving toward or holding middle-class status having successfully completed degree level qualifications (i.e., at Bible college or other higher education establishments) either within Malawi or elsewhere in Africa. Two could be viewed as still in or emerging from waithood since they were not yet married or financially secure. The other coordinator worked for an international agency and was married and could therefore be viewed as possessing "adult" status. Youth leader participants were all aged 18-30 and this group included some young people who might be described as marginalized and/or at risk, i.e., they find themselves excluded from the societal mainstream (including social support services) and have limited control over their life chances and resources.

Data Collection

Data were collected between June 2012 and June 2015 by the first author, who was a full-time member of staff at the host university. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the research ethics committee of the same institution and prior consent for data collection was gained by way of scheduled (in situ) face-to-face meetings with community stakeholders and individual respondents. Interviews and focus group lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed in full. Variations in interview timing were solely due to the availability of respondents. Mentoring was a vital part of each of the community projects, and this had been fostered since the inception of the initiative. The study sought to investigate the different forms that mentoring took and the impact that these had both on youth leaders themselves and on the young people with whom they worked.

Interview discussions followed a predetermined schedule or guide comprising a number of open-ended questions that explored respondent experiences of leading their respective projects and associated activities (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Focus group discussions developed the commonly occurring themes raised by interview participants in order to explore these in more detail and on a collective basis. These discussions centered on the relationship between the types of mentoring that had emerged within the context of project work and how effective these had been in empowering the

young people concerned. The aim was to allow youth leaders to narrate their own journeys into and through SDP work. Such insights were key to understanding the distinctive philosophy and structure of each community project and the personal motivations and approaches in play. Crucially, these narratives helped to uncover the extent to which mentoring empowered youth leaders to bring about social change for other young people. In sum, interviews aimed to help young leaders present their views on the future place of mentoring within their communities.

Notwithstanding the issues of methodological rigor that have been raised in relation to processes of respondent validation or member checking (see Smith & McGannon, 2018; Tracy, 2010), in accordance with conventional practice, project participants were offered the opportunity to reflect on interview and focus group discussions. To this end, two collective meetings were held in person between the first author and respondents once data collection was complete. At the first of these meetings the preliminary research findings were summarized and presented diagrammatically. At the second (several days later), respondents were given the opportunity to discuss the findings in more detail having had time to reflect on the initial summary. In addition, in the summer of 2018, some nine months after completing the research, the first author returned to Mzuzu for a four-day visit in order to provide an opportunity for participants and community stakeholders to further discuss the findings of the study, which were provided beforehand in written form. Nine people attended this half-day meeting, which was specifically arranged to generate feedback from those involved in the project thereby providing an opportunity for data triangulation. Attendees validated the accuracy of the findings and added a number of new perspectives in terms of analysis, such as the prevalence of youth alienation within families (especially the way in which traditional forms of fathering exacerbated existing tensions between adults and youths on account of fathers having a tendency to be emotionally distant, authoritarian, and judgmental); the need for structural change to enhance youth empowerment; and the need for greater political awareness among young people (especially their understanding of the country's constitution and national youth policy). Future implications for the project were also discussed, and these included the need to strengthen and extend existing networks between and across the regional delivery sites involved in the project (especially a greater commitment to sharing knowledge around key themes such as mentoring, empowerment, and leadership development); and the establishment of a youth-led resource center for shared learning with the aim of extending this learning to other community agencies. In addition, the first author made himself available for further conversations about the research and, as a consequence, extended meetings took place with two key stakeholders. Though somewhat inconclusive, such practices may be seen as a genuine attempt to achieve what Smith and McGannon (2018) have described as the ethical reframing of member checking processes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was deployed in line with the conventions of qualitative research through a process of open, axial, and selective coding and the formation of a conceptual framework that facilitated the presentation of participant experiences from their own perspective (Bryman, 2015; Robson & McCartan, 2016). Data were analyzed in four stages by the first author. First, transcripts were read in full to gain an overview of the data. Second, each transcript was individually coded in line with key concepts in the extant literature (i.e., "youth empowerment") and indexed, whereby a capturing of the different aspects of participant experience took place. Third, these experiences were then categorized into a number of overarching topics broadly relating to issues concerning youth, relationships, and social transformation. The final stage of analysis involved the formal organization of these topics into three generic themes (for data management purposes) by further exploring the key issues around participant experience and framing these experiences within the context of existing conceptual debate (differentiated by respondents). These themes comprised: (1) alienation and constraint, (2) mentoring approaches and experiences, and (3) sport, empowerment, and social change. To a large extent, the latter two themes emerged as specific responses to the challenges and problems highlighted by the first. The following section presents a detailed analysis of these themes, which incorporates transcript extracts from participants. In the interests of anonymity, pseudonyms have been used where necessary.

RESULTS AND THEMES

Alienation and Constraint

One of the issues that dominated the highly demanding cultural context in which youth leaders lived and worked was that they had limited opportunities to share their experiences of working with young people. As we have seen, tensions between generations are characteristic of the sub-Saharan region, and one of the key discussion points for youth leaders was how this rift between generations adversely affected mentoring aimed at empowering youth. Lionel, for example, reflected on how he had experienced hostility from a group of young people from Masasa, a slum

district of Mzuzu and an area with significant social problems:

It is not easy working with this tribe. . . . If you're not careful they can beat you up. That's who they are. They can shout, they can fight and they can do what[so]ever because . . . we are looking to [at] somebody who has got no value [in relation to society] because some of these streets kids they have already given up on life . . . they don't care. So mentoring such kinds of people it has been a very hard time.

Here Lionel points to a hopelessness and deep disillusionment on the part of young people in question. Conversely, Leonardo (another youth leader) expressed the view that it was possible for adults to misread the aggression of this group:

You can mistake aggression for confidence. All kids that come from this vulnerable situation develop a very . . . thick skin as a mode of defence, so they are aggressive, they are up to go and alert. But, realistically speaking, it is a wound that has just formed a thick scar on top of it.

Notwithstanding the generalized nature of Leonardo's comments, what he alludes to here is that the aggression of these young people simply serves to hide feelings of profound insecurity. These life views are consistent with the findings of Hondwana (2013) about the waithood generation. She writes of those caught in this liminal state that "they lead a precarious existence; their efforts are centered on trying to survive each day" (p. 3).

When it came to the general perceptions of younger people on the part of the older generation, this resentment and hostility was perceived to be two sided. Boniface summarized a shared conception when he said, "I think young people are generally viewed as rebellious and disorderly." He related this as a conflict between the generations and implied that this may affect the willingness of elders to become mentors:

Much [of] the problem is the conflict . . . in the sense that the older generation blames the younger generation for bad behavior, and the younger generation has some blame over this. But I think there is a need for mentoring on the part of the older generation they should lead but we don't have these people because when I talk to the older generation they tell me about how bad the younger generation are.

This idea of the generations being in conflict echoes the findings of Muna et al. (2014) in Kenya with reference to the political arena in which younger people have begun to openly challenge the monopoly of leadership and power traditionally held by the older generation. The notion of generational conflict also appears in the work of Dawson (2014) where young people in Johannesburg protest because of the lack of opportunities available to them and are thus perceived by the older generation as "militant." Negative perceptions of youth also applied in Mzuzu and other parts of Malawi where, according to Boniface, youth were often perceived as "badly behaved, rebellious, and disorderly." In other words, youth were seen as defiantly opposing the more powerful older generation and were consequently labeled as deviant. In a similar way, the perceived hostility toward young people in this generational conflict can also be read as a sign of insecurity, and even fear, on the part of elders. According to Leonardo, this insecurity and fear of young people permeated every level of Malawian society:

I have been involved in the youth in politics, church, sports, and even youth government; there is only one word for it, fear. The community is afraid of the youth. Why? We have a generation which has got profound talent, skill, so when the youth are younger they . . . simply say, "Ah, get rid of them, get them out of the way so they don't disturb our programmes, keep them somewhere keep them busy."

In the eyes of both Boniface and Leonardo, such intergenerational dynamics had resulted in a limitation of the involvement of young people at different levels of Malawian society. According to Hondwana (2013), this lack of status and trust is a common feature of waithood. She found that many of the young people she interviewed in different nations throughout Africa felt that they were not valued by elders, not taken seriously, not listened to. Similarly, Kang'ethe (2014) draws attention to the condescending attitude that can exist toward young people in patriarchal societies within the sub-Saharan region that can serve to stifle youth aspirations.

Given the lack of trust between youth and adult generations, it is perhaps not surprising that young people do not actively seek older mentors. Such proactive approaches to mentoring would require confidence and self-esteem on the part of the young people concerned and a willingness to engage on the part of the older generation. This situation creates social conditions unfavorable to mentoring—elders are reluctant to pass on power and knowledge to those they fear will take away their security and material advantage. Younger and older people each show signs of oppression, including insecurity, fatalism, and self-deprecation. How then, we might ask, was mentoring perceived by young people and how might it be used to reverse some of the signs of multilevel oppression prevalent in Malawian

society?

Mentoring Approaches and Experiences

As we have seen, social context can have a significant impact on how mentoring is defined and enacted. Throughout the research, there was a unanimous view among respondents that mentoring was important and valuable. Leonardo summed up the frustration felt both by project coordinators and youth leaders that, on the one hand youth mentoring was rare (because of the factors described), while on the other it had a vital role to play in the future of Malawi and its young people:

If you ask me, mentorship is the missing link today. Malawi is in chaos right now because of the absence of mentorship. . . . We have brilliant young people that are going to die to their potential if we don't mentor them; the transition from the elderly leaving room to the young in Malawi is costing us everything.

Leonardo's notion of "the elderly leaving room to the young" accurately echoes that of waithood. In this sense, all of the participants highlighted the importance of informality as a characteristic of mentoring. Discussions centered on the value of informal mentoring as a particularly effective response to the social and personal context of young people in Mzuzu. This line of thought was introduced by Gift, a young leader who had been mentored by a more mature leader (in the same focus group):

That age gap needs to be closed. For me to tell you about myself there needs to be that friendship that (the leader) gave me . . . the relationship that we built. It's a relationship that helped me, that is to bring out myself, he is ageless. There are mentors but they want to do it in a formal way.

The formal approach to mentoring described here is similar to the model criticized by Piper and Piper (1999). In such approaches, the young mentee is expected to take on a passive role with the focus of the relationship being on a modification of behavior according to a "socially prescribed blue print" (Becker, 1991, p. 127). This approach might also be aligned with the functionalist style of mentoring, which according to Brockbank and McGill (2006) is hierarchical and focuses on retaining the status quo (as defined by the organization or service involved). This can also lead to the reproduction of social inequalities.

The idea that informal rather than formal mentoring meets the needs of youth was endorsed by all of the younger respondents. They felt that such a style could enable older mentors to address the perceived social inequality between generations. As the discussion continued, a clearer picture of the benefits of the informal approach began to emerge. Liz (a youth leader) picked up this theme by emphasizing the closeness made possible by informal mentoring relationships, which, in her view, encouraged openness about the feelings and aims of the young person concerned. She continued by describing the particular interpersonal qualities demonstrated by an older woman in charge of a residential setting, who acted as a mentor to a younger female resident who was struggling with suicidal thoughts:

At first the . . . girl could not open up to the older woman but then the older woman started to be open with her. As a result of this approach the girl started talking. The mistress [older woman] became informal in the way she was talking and so as soon as this happened the girl started being open to her; she told her all that was happening. . . . So without dropping to her level and being informal, I think she would not have been open to her.

Liz uses an interesting phrase here—"dropping to her level"—which implies a deliberate choice on the part of the mentor to equalize the power relationship. Liz also emphasizes the significance of "closeness" made possible through "openness," which in turn implies a bond of mutual trust.

The informality outlined by Liz provided an opportunity for the relationship between more and less mature people to equalize. This in turn provided the possibility for empathy on the part of the mentor and self-disclosure on the part of the mentee resulting from growing levels of trust. Such mentoring also provided the opportunity for mentees to feel valued and to glean a sense of hope in oppressive circumstances. Significantly, this approach was seen to be in stark contrast to the mentoring and general interaction that typically occurred between the generations. The levels of trust possible in such relationships provided mentors with the opportunity to challenge and confront mentees when appropriate (see Clutterbuck, 2014). Hence, informal mentoring was not restricted to supportive approaches but included intentional elements (Lewis, 2009). This challenge may also include the transfer of power from mentor to mentee, which required humility on the part of the mentor and provided the backdrop for younger people to act more responsibly.

The accent on humility here is contrary to the deficit-focused approach, which seems to prevail in many levels of Malawian society and shows itself in the willingness of the youth leaders to adopt a position of vulnerability with young people. These relationships had taken time to

develop, but with increasing confidence and trust, young people were beginning to follow the example of their leaders by engaging in mentoring themselves. This was seen by youth leaders as the emergence of generational connection through mentoring and was perceived by them as a potential way to overcome intergenerational conflict and as a mechanism for empowerment and social change.

Sport, Empowerment, and Social Change

We have seen how counter-cultural styles of mentoring were adopted by some youth leaders and that these had the potential to facilitate increased communication between generations. But to what extent did sport act as a facilitation mechanism for mentoring to take place for the empowerment of young people? Boniface provided insight into such issues during individual interview:

So we have been working with the sports young people [young people who are interested in sports]. The idea is to use sport to teach mentoring, business, and a lot more things including social issues that affect the young people. Generally, we have seen an improvement because I remember when we first started, it was discouraging. You would not want to go ahead with the projects; but we have witnessed tremendous fruits and . . . personally I have seen some young people growing from just being beneficiaries, to actually going now to benefit the rest of the young people.

Lionel reported similar events in the challenging district of Masasa:

So we find that sports to them is life. . . . So we put a [development] programme inside sports like education, social support, and civic education. We do sexual protection, HIV/AIDS, and child rights. Things like this can only be carried by sports and with the mentoring programme approach.

As well as explaining moral principles, James, a young leader from a community tennis project, outlined how the positive occupation of vulnerable young people (from Masasa) on the tennis court had the potential to prevent more destructive immoral and self-harming behaviors in other contexts:

If the guys [are] involved in immoral behavior, we try to change [them] by using [their] time on the court instead of time in drinking or smoking or whatever, and bring them on the court so that they should make a change.

The above transcript extracts indicate that sport is seen by these young leaders as a way to distract youth from self-destructive behaviors, which is one of the rationales commonly put forward in relation to SDP projects (see Mwaanga, 2010). The attractive quality of sport is especially evident in Lionel's comment "sport to them is life" and therefore, by implication, sport is seen as a powerful way to draw youth together and into other (diversionary) activities.

A further theme which subsequently emerged from interview discussions was the implicit recognition that sport, in and of itself, was not sufficient to assist young people developmentally. Instead, a robust strategic and longer-term approach was required to enable such projects to bear fruit in areas like talent development, business, social support, education, and civic engagement (see Hartman, 2003). Throughout the research process, youth leaders routinely reported that sport provided a helpful starting point for the development of mentoring relationships with young people in their communities. This resulted in what was perceived by these leaders as positive social change. Similarly, focus group participants repeatedly referred to the significance of "partnership" within the community to achieve change through mentoring. For them, the starting point for such partnership working was often with the parents of the young people who were engaged in their projects. Sharon saw this as a vital connection:

You can start working with the kids, but you must keep in mind where these children are coming from. So we should monitor the development of the children but we should not just get carried away with mentoring [children]. . . . We can use the same mentorship to work with the parents . . . where these children are coming from.

The participative enterprises, outlined by Lionel, resemble the critical SDP approaches proposed by Spaaij and Jeanes (2012) and Hartman and Kwauk (2011) who call for a curriculum focused on the significant themes and concerns of disempowered people. Likewise, Lionel's descriptions conform fully to the "bottom up" SDP community development philosophy called for by Jeanes and Magee (2011). This carefully considered approach to partnership and advocacy aims to give voice to otherwise disempowered youth. This is fostered through a process of mentoring aimed at ensuring that the voices of young people are presented to (local) government in the hope that someone listens. In the same way that oppression can operate at different levels, respondent experiences seemed to point to a reversal of such patterns, whereby empowerment and social change was stimulated from one-to-one encounters.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this paper has been to investigate the reasons behind youth disengagement and marginalization in the city of Mzuzu in northern Malawi and to explore how one SDP initiative used empowerment-based mentoring in an attempt to bring about change in the lives of young people. In particular, the paper has sought to uncover how specific mentoring approaches might serve to overcome deeply embedded social tensions and anxieties by encouraging the (re)establishment of intergenerational trust and respect.

Findings demonstrate that the frustrations expressed by young people in Mzuzu appear to be part of a wider phenomenon affecting youth across the sub-Saharan region of Africa. This is encapsulated by the notion of the waithood generation—young people bereft of the personal, social, and educational resources to attain traditional cultural markers ascribed to adulthood. This, in turn, has deep and socially divisive consequences, since young people facing such constraints feel increasingly resentful toward an older generation who they perceive to hold power. Simultaneously, elders are inclined to look down on a younger generation they often see as dangerous and militant. This results in a cycle of fear, mistrust, resentment, and intergenerational conflict, which is damaging to a society already battling to survive in a globalized and increasingly competitive world (Hondwana, 2013).

These findings also point to practical ways in which youth leaders might seek to address the challenges faced by the waithood generation. The significance of sport in engaging and drawing young people together was recognized by respondents. However, rather than sporting participation being the catalyst for the individual empowerment of young people, it was the mentoring relationships developed alongside sport that appeared to be most effective. In this sense, sport fulfilled an important backstage role in the development of mentor-mentee relations, acting as a point of common ground and/or shared experience around which these relationships could be initiated and established (see also Albright et al., 2017). Mentoring was widely recognized by respondents as well-suited to the needs of young people in the delicate transitional stage of waithood. This is because such relationships provided the opportunity for personal and social development (among other things). This was felt to be the case particularly if an informal and flexible approach was used to meet the diverse needs of the young people concerned.

Informal mentoring (flowing from a natural rapport established through sport) was perceived to be a particularly helpful way to support young people. In contrast to the deficit-focused, authoritarian approaches typically adopted with youth within this context, the most effective mentors made themselves vulnerable with (and equal to) the young people who they sought to support. Another perceived advantage of informal mentoring was that it could take place during sports and related pursuits. The depth of rapport and quality of trust established through such natural interactions also made it possible for mentors to confront mentees without creating resentment and alienation. This, in turn, appeared to promote opportunities for self-evaluation and critical thinking among young people.

All of the youth leaders involved in the research agreed that this counter-cultural approach to mentoring held the key for wider social change within different spheres of influence from individual, family, small group, and community, to regional and national levels. This approach took into account the interdependence of parents and youth. Hence, direct support was provided for parents in their care-taking role, and this made it more likely that youth would remain in school. In this way, the project attempted to address some of the root causes of the problems that young people faced in their communities. Young people were subsequently supported to take their concerns into wider social spheres via community forums that involved various civic leaders. That said, many of the mentoring practices highlighted were only partially formed, and further research is required to refine and consolidate these models and to explore their potential.

Alongside these findings, the authors acknowledge the following limitations of this study. First, the majority of respondents were practitioners from low-income socioeconomic backgrounds, while UK-based project workers (both staff and students) came from more affluent circumstances. Hence, there was the potential for this disparity to hinder relational dynamics. However, the project had been running for several years prior to the present data being collected, and academic staff enjoyed well-established relationships with project coordinators and community stakeholders, which facilitated a level of trust and credibility in relation to student project workers.

Second, a shortcoming of projects of this nature is that they often function around a romanticization of the role and impact of sport. Indeed, some have argued that claims surrounding the transformative potential of sport have been exaggerated (see Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011; Coalter, 2013, 2015). In this sense, it is generally accepted that the provision of such activities is not enough to prevent the occurrence of social problems but that they can be used in community settings to generate positive change in young people to the extent that they may even alleviate criminal

and/or antisocial behavior (see Parker et al., 2019). In contrast, the project workers and respondents in this study demonstrated an awareness that, in and of itself, sport is not sufficient to assist young people, but that in addition, there is need for robust, strategic, long-term programs to support youth education and development.

Finally, and relatedly, we are aware of the limitations of this research in terms of the extent to which conclusions might be drawn about the overall impact of sport on social change. We recognize that the findings presented are contextually specific and emanate from a single, locally based project. Though part of a longer-term evaluation, we are also aware that these findings are based upon the interpretations of two authors who have been directly involved in the inception and delivery of the project concerned and who hold a vested interest in its success and sustainability. Needless to say, all of these issues should be taken into account by the reader.

NOTE

1. For more on client-centered empowerment models of mentoring or life coaching amid the challenges of "embedded power structures," see Brockbank and McGill's (2006) notion of "evolutionary mentoring."

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Original Research

The Americanization of sport for development and peace: Examining American SDP intern experiences

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ABSTRACT

This study expands the Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) research focusing on the impact of national values and ideas on SDP program implementation. As SDP interns are instrumental in implementing many SDP programs, it is important to identify how their national values and ideas affect their work in the field. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences of Americans who had worked as SDP interns. Through the lens of Americanization, we examine the reproduction and distribution of values and ideas of American SDP interns working abroad. Semistructured interviews were conducted with 11 former American SDP interns to explore their perspectives and reflections on the work they carried out as American SDP interns. Throughout the interviews, American ideas rooted in neoliberalism, capitalism, and education appeared as conceptual influences that were woven into their SDP internship experience. The findings indicated that, in their role as American SDP interns, the participants were at once complicit in and resistant to reproducing inequitable power relations, constantly wrestling with personal ideologies and American sporting values that did not align with cultural and social norms of the host countries. Implications of this study emphasize the continued need for SDP analyses to identify and critically consider nation-specific values and ideas of SDP workers and their impact on the local implementation of SDP programs.

INTRODUCTION

Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) is an international movement encompassing a wide array of initiatives and programs that use sport as a vehicle for change, often with humanitarian and conflict resolution aims in an international development context (Gadais, 2019). SDP actors utilize sport, physical activity, and play to attain specific objectives outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a global agenda adopted by the member states of the United Nations in 2015 to address a range of issues linked to political, social, and public health topics such as poverty, educational opportunities, and gender equity (Beutler, 2008; Darnell et al., 2019; Kidd, 2008). Numbers across the Beyond Sport Network and the institutional SDP website, sportanddev.org, indicate over 250 SDP projects originate from America, Canada, and Western Europe that implement activities domestically and have established programs abroad.

Many scholars have critiqued the field of SDP for lack of clarity in its definition, scope, and objectives (Whitley et al., 2019). Further, as SDP projects are established, organized, and implemented globally and involve a host of diverse actors, critiques have also targeted the ways in which SDP actors have imposed their norms, values, and ideas on local populations. Prior research shows the great extent to which ideologies espoused in SDP projects can be laden with sporting norms and beliefs derived from the cultures and

Keywords: sport for development and peace; Americanization; neoliberalism; imperialism; interns

norms of the countries from which the projects originate (Darnell, 2012; Guest, 2009; Hasselgård & Straume, 2015). With many disparate actors in the field, there is ambiguity in how SDP is organized and implemented (Black, 2010). Specifically, research on SDP workers' experiences includes studies looking at Canadian SDP interns (Darnell, 2012), Norwegian perspectives in the field (Hasselgård, 2015; Straume & Hasselgård, 2014), and the organizational capacity of SDP organization (Svensson & Hambrick, 2016). Though many SDP programs originate in America, and several studies highlight the impact of Americanization on the flow and transfer of information around the world, few academic studies distinctly concentrate on American SDP interns and their experiences through the lens of Americanization. Thus, using the lens of Americanization, the purpose of this study was to explore how American SDP interns conceptualize and reproduce American (sporting) values while interning in the SDP sector. We also ask to what extent SDP can be a carrier of cultural (sporting) values recognizable as American. Considering the ways in which the interns' work was underpinned by American beliefs and principles, we focused on the challenges the interns faced while negotiating their American-based ideals and values with those based on the local communities' culture and history.

Within the broader context of sport, scholars have examined how American ideals, systems, and corporations have influenced global sport (Galily & Sheard, 2002 Kidd, 1991; Jackson, 1994; Park, 2011). For example, Kidd (1991) illustrates that Americanization of Canadian sport has historically been characterized by the exportation of Canadian nationals to American teams and phrases such as the "American forward pass" and other associations of sporting ways to American innovations. Given the extent that American ideas have transferred into sporting cultures around the world, we find it important to examine this in SDP. We frame our analysis through the concept of Americanization, which is defined as the one-way diffusion of American ideas, customs, and capital around the world (Ritzer & Stillman, 2003). Specific to this study is how American ideas related to sport participation are promoted in the SDP sector by workers who were intimately involved with an SDP project abroad.

Using data collected from in-depth, one-on-one interviews with former SDP interns, we examine the experiences of American SDP interns bringing their beliefs, ideals, and prior knowledge to the SDP sites and the impact on their SDP internship work. We argue that a critical examination of the influence of American SDP interns and their experiences is essential in understanding how American ideals, perceptions, and (sporting) cultural ideologies influence and become a part of SDP implementation. The importance of this paper is twofold: (1) it critically unpacks American SDP concerning the espousing of ideas and values, and (2) it provides a further yet different insight into SDP practice. We also provide further insight into the internship and volunteer experiences of many young adults in SDP, something that continually needs to be addressed (Chawansky, 2015). Thus, we add to the ongoing discussion that considers how SDP actors influence program implementation.

AMERICANIZATION

Here, we discuss the subject of Americanization as it underpins this study. It is important to acknowledge that Americanization stems from the broader term globalization (Mendis, 2005; Ritzer & Stillman, 2003). Globalization is a transplanetary process involving a multidirectional flow of people, objects, and information, as well as the structures that create these flows (Ritzer, 2010). Narrowing globalization as a conceptual framework, Americanization is more focused on the processes and ideas formulated in American society and subsequently dispersed throughout the world (Zeitlein, 2000). Popular corporations whose widespread brand production and consumption exemplify the pervasive reach of Americanization include McDonalds and Coca-Cola (Kuisel, 2003).

Donnelly (1996) critically explains that "Americanization tends to be viewed as a one-way process in which American cultural forms, products, and meanings are imposed on other cultures at the expense of the domestic culture" (p. 242). Thus, there tends to be an element of cultural hegemony in which American products and ideas are both forced onto and consumed by locales around the world. The cultural hegemony leads to a critical examination of how American beliefs and products are transmitted around the world. As well, Americanization should be understood not as an abstract idea but rather an ongoing historical project that has promoted American characteristics, practice, and knowledge that foreign nations have adopted into their domestic activities (Zeitlein, 2000). The process of Americanization is not only concerned with tangible objects but also has stakes in the acculturation of people (Yoseloff, 1999). Hoffman (2007) argues that the process of Americanization also encompasses how people or groups adopt American culture, values, or habits. Through the process of Americanization, then, American ideals, ways of life, and social processes have the potential to transform the lives of people abroad. Broadly, American ideals have perpetuated education rooted in a capitalist and neoliberal reality (Zeitlein, 2000).

Jackson (1994) details that Americanization creates terrains of ideological struggle between American culture and particular domestic cultures, resulting in cultural imperialism. Cultural imperialism involves importation processes that diffuse cultural practices, such as sport, around the world (Guttmann, 1991). Americanization can thus be understood as a form of cultural imperialism in that it involves the diffusion of American ideas and values into non-American locales and is regarded as "the semantic transformations that attend the dissemination of American cultural messages across the world" (Kroes, 1999, p. 463).

Americanization is supported by the extent to which local cultures passively absorb powerful cultural images, beliefs, and traditions linked to American social life (Giulianotti, 2005). Houlihan (1994) argues that the problem with Americanization occurs when companies (i.e., sport teams/organizations) lead other cultures to assimilate to outside (American) influences. As a result, Americanization is implicated in modernization and development processes by which American-centric ideologies permeate or blend into the international landscape (Wagner, 1990). The influence of the practices and ideologies of American sports, whether through sport business practices or style of play, has had an impact on sporting cultures abroad.

Americanization imposes the promotion and utilization of American knowledge and ideals in sport cultures. Sport, specifically, can be seen as more Americanized than areas like music and film due to how sport is presented through products, services, and ideas (Donnelly, 1996). That is, sport is a significant cultural vehicle by which the impact of Americanization is evident in the diffusion of American experiences, ideas, and values in sport cultures around the world. Darnell et al. (2019) acknowledge that American interventions and programs have dominated an SDP narrative from colonial movements to current day practice. Hence, SDP can be a place where American ideas may be transferred and dispersed. In turn, critical attention is needed to what these ideas are, how they are transferred, and if they are accepted or resisted during implementation.

Americanization in Sport

From a theoretical perspective, there has been little research applying an Americanization framework to SDP. However, there has been substantial research analyzing the American influences on sporting cultures worldwide, including, for example, Canada (Kidd, 1991) and Australia (McKay & Miller, 1991).

Americanization in global sporting contexts can be viewed as a process that creates and reproduces American-centric ideologies that have the potential to overtake and eclipse local sporting ideas. In recent years, the Americanization thesis has been used to critically examine the current space of English Premier League soccer, focusing, for example, on the negative impact of corporate businesses on the ways the game is played and the movement of bodies across global borders (Williams & Hopkins, 2011). Moreover, Hoehn et al. (1999) acknowledge how European football leagues have examined and compared their systems to that of American sports leagues. Conflict emerges as European leagues shift their organizational practices to adapt to an American professional sports model. The organization and presentation of American sports continue to influence sport systems around the world. Recently, Backman and Carlsson (2020) unpacked Americanization in Swedish Hockey culture and commercial production. Through a historical analysis, the authors acknowledged how the conceptualization, practice, and presentation of Swedish Hockey were influenced by an "American Way" of commercialization. What becomes apparent from their depiction is that Swedish hockey can be Americanized through the manifestation of market-driven commercial efforts and initiatives. In turn, the domestic Swedish Hockey League becomes more culturally aligned and resembles the American-dominated National Hockey League. Thus, examining the American sport system and its values, such as individual governing bodies and commercial profit, provides insight into American influence in global sport.

The influence of American cultural and political practice has the potential to shape international sporting dynamics. Park (2011) argues that the teaching of American baseball to the citizens of Puerto Rico created space for aspects of American sport and physical activity (e.g., YMCA creation) to enter and influence Puerto Ricans during the early 1900s. The introduction of American sports was not merely constrained to ideological processes of Americanization, but the coaches and teachers who brought sport with them were complicit agents of colonialism (Park, 2011). In this instance, Americanization becomes a colonial practice in sport that influences, and unevenly transforms, local sporting practices.

Americanization also represents and reproduces "American capitalist hegemony" within sport (Kidd, 1991; Jackson, 1994). Americanization of sport ideologies occurs when ideologies intertwined with American political, social, and cultural life take form in other nations. In response to the widespread influence of American sporting ideologies on the global sporting landscape, Kidd (1991) asks, "How can sports foster socially responsible personal growth and community when outsiders determine the dominant

meanings and forms of activities?" (p. 179). In other words, it is important to consider that imposing American sporting ideologies (and their corollary, capitalist hegemony) on other nations, shifts the global power dynamics, reducing the voice and authority of local communities (Kidd, 1991).

In much the same way as the American sporting industry has infiltrated other nations' sporting culture, American SDP volunteers and interns abroad may import and infuse American ideals into local communities. For example, historically, American ambitions in using sport culturally and politically have played a significant role in driving Americanization in countries such as the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam (Darnell et al., 2019). With a focus on Americanization in general and American values and ideas that shape SDP work in particular, in this study we bring attention to the experiences of Americans who had worked as SDP interns in order to continue a nuanced discussion of SDP practitioners.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The current study is situated in literature that critically examines how SDP practice is influenced by experiences and values of SDP interns from global North countries (see Darnell, 2012). Scholars have explored how interns and volunteers encountered SDP spaces (see Darnell 2011, 2012; Smith et al., 2014). The field of SDP, and thus the related literature, does not include a standard set of terms and labels; rather, there are many different labels that researchers and practitioners employ, such as sport-for-development (SFD) or sport-and-development (Black, 2010; Hartman & Kwauk, 2011). For this study we chose to use SDP, which is often employed as an umbrella term within research and scholarship in this area. Exploring how SDP practitioners engage with the field, we discuss the findings, limitations, and gaps in prior research below.

Postcolonial Tendencies in SDP

Critical scholars have examined SDP through a postcolonial framework, drawing on discussions that position SDP as an extension of colonial legacies (Darnell, 2012; Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011; Hayhurst, 2014; Mwaanga & Banda, 2014; Tiessen, 2011) as well as how these legacies espouse neoliberal ideals and values (Forde, 2014; Hayhurst, 2009; Kwauk, 2014; Samie et al., 2015). Hayhurst (2009) explains that postcolonialism in SDP refers to the continued effect of colonial practices in developing nations. Complementary research by Darnell (2010) exemplifies how neoliberal discourse perpetuated by SDP workers from the Global North engenders their ideas about how sport can best serve participants. Scholars have thus been highly critical of SDP programs, which often result in the displacement of domestic knowledge with development practices and ideologies derived from Global North countries, while placing the onus of development on the host country. Concerning program implementation, for example, Mwaanga and Banda (2014) identify the postcolonial tendencies of SDP, whereby SDP workers disempower local communities while privileging the imported practices and associated values and ideas of the SDP organizations. Black (2010) and Levermore (2011) argue that doing SDP work in this way is a top-down process, whereby outsiders enter what they consider marginalized areas to enforce programs for intended beneficiaries.

An examination of SDP through a postcolonial framework shows that though SDP participants may gain valuable experiences and skills, these are often aligned with neoliberal ideologies that direct participants to be more self-manageable and reliant (Hayhurst, 2014). The institution of SDP often enables and promotes the social reproduction of neocolonial morals, neoliberal ideologies, and the privilege and dominance of SDP workers (Darnell, 2014). Thus, what resonates in SDP implementation, mainly when organized by Global North actors, is a societal discourse espousing goals and ideals dictated by SDP organizations. For example, Hasselgård (2015) and Hasselgård and Straume (2015) analyzed how Norwegian SDP narratives permeated Africa-focused projects, often emphasizing Norwegian development discourses. These practices can be harmful on many accounts, especially when the project is viewed as what Tiessen (2011) describes as a "civilizing mission," in which SDP actors impose their knowledge on local communities, believing that their intentions are good willed.

A postcolonial framework has been especially instructive for scholars that have interviewed SFD workers (Darnell, 2010; Hayhurst, 2014) and drawn out the inherent, though at times inadvertent, ways staff members produce postcolonial knowledge (Darnell, 2010, 2014; Hayhurst, 2014). More attention is needed to identify further how SDP projects are adopting colonizing approaches, as this will provide further insight into the global flows of ideas, values, and practices (Kay, 2009). In the current study, we acknowledge the critical discourse in SDP and further critique the field by elaborating on the intersections of American values, ideas and practices in SDP implementation.

Volunteering in the Sport for Development and Peace Sector

As the field of SDP has expanded, so has the critical academic research on SDP, focusing on its impact, actors,

practices, and outcomes (Gadais, 2019). While there is a substantial body of research focused on the implementation and outcomes of SDP programs (see, in particular, Darnell, 2012; Hayhurst et al., 2016; Schulenkorf et al. , 2014), there is a dearth of research on the experiences of SDP workers, including SDP managers, volunteers, and interns (Chawansky, 2015; Manley et al. 2014, Svennson et al., 2016). Understanding the experiences of SDP workers is vital in so far as the social and cultural impact of SDP programs cannot be separated from the perspectives and beliefs of the workers who develop, implement, and assess the programs (Darnell, 2012; Hasselgård, 2015; Straume & Hasselgård, 2014).

With many SDP institutions hailing from the Global North, a major criticism of these programs targets the people involved in the delivery of SDP, ranging from organizational leaders and government officers to interns (Coalter, 2010; Darnell, 2007; Darnell, 2010, 2012; Giulianotti et al, 2016; Hayhurst, 2009; Hayhurst & Frisby, 2010; Jackson & Haigh, 2008). A common issue is that having been raised and educated in the Global North, a person originating from America or Canada often assumes an element of privilege and knowledge (Darnell, 2007; Forde, 2013).

When young people from countries such as America and Canada embark on SDP volunteer and internship opportunities, they assume influential roles as practitioners and points of knowledge for these programs in developing countries (Darnell, 2012; Welty-Peachey et al., 2014, 2015). As these groups of SDP workers enter countries that are less developed compared to their homes, preconceived knowledge can negatively affect the implementation of SDP programs. Though the hierarchal positioning of ideas and beliefs is often unintentional, it nonetheless has the power to significantly shapes one's experiences. For example, previous research on SDP volunteers and interns found problematic elements related to racial ideologies (Darnell, 2007, 2010), power relationships (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011), and ethical challenges (Darnell, 2012), and further, that SDP often reinforced a dominant approach, wherein sport reproduced and socialized unequal power relationships and social hierarchy (Hartman & Kwauk, 2011).

Darnell et al. (2018) argue that more attention needs to be paid to analyses of socialization and the production of SDP. The majority of the SDP workers, including program staff, volunteers, and donors, are often trained in Global North countries before traveling to the host locations where SDP projects are implemented. Consequently, much SDP work is heavily influenced by beliefs and value systems that stem from Global North countries such as America, Canada, and Norway (Darnell, 2012; Guest, 2009; Straume & Hasselgård, 2014). As the number of SDP programs continues to grow and the influence of the SDP sector expands, it would be instructive to examine and learn more about how SDP is delivered through projects established in the Global North (Hasselgård, 2015) and to contextualize and understand the work of SDP from the perspectives of those who implement the programs.

Volunteers and interns fill many roles and provide a significant amount of labor in order to run SDP programs. As an integral part of SDP organization and implementation, their actions have the potential to greatly impact the communities they are charged to work in; yet, the extent and the nature of the impact depends on their ability to recognize and negotiate tensions that arise from cultural differences with the host communities. Educational backgrounds and positions of privilege influence and infiltrate the experiences of Global North interns who espouse their sporting ideologies and experiences within their SDP work (Darnell, 2010; Tiessen, 2011; Welty-Peachey et al., 2018). Thus, just as studies on SDP discourses from Canadian and Norwegian contexts have been examined by Darnell (2012) and Hasselgård (2015) and Straume & Hasselgård (2014), respectively, we engage in a theoretical exploration of SDP from an American context, and more specifically as it is embedded in Americanization processes, to provide further critical insight into how SDP actors are implementing programs.

METHODS

In the current study, we use the lens of Americanization to examine the ways in which SDP interns acted as carriers of American-influenced practices, beliefs, and values to their host countries. To investigate the experiences of Americans who had formerly interned for an SDP organization, the primary researcher (first author) conducted a basic qualitative inquiry (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) utilizing semistructured interviews. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) consider basic qualitative inquiry as an approach to research that does not have a direct type of theoretical underpinning (i.e., ethnography or phenomenology) but rather is rooted in a constructivist paradigm where researchers are concerned with how people understand their experiences in a particular setting. Below we provide further details of our methodological process.

SDP Organizations and Participants

Participants were recruited from two American SDP organizations. Institutional Review Board (Ethics

Committee) approval was obtained by the authors' academic institution. To protect the participants' confidentiality, we assigned each participant a pseudonym and likewise used fictional names for the organizations. The fictional names represent the focus of the organization and are used here to make a distinction between the two. African Education and Sport (AES) primarily aims to address HIV/AIDS education in African countries (e.g., South Africa), while Youth Development and Sport (YDS) focuses on fostering youth development in populations that are underserved in developing countries in Africa and Latin America (e.g., Uganda and Nicaragua). Both organizations use soccer (Association Football) as the vehicle by which they implement their educational program.

A total of 11 former American SDP interns participated in the research. Out of the 11 interns interviewed, five were female and six were male. All participants in the research characterized themselves as White American. Although a more ethnically or racially diverse group was preferred and would have provided an important point of comparison, these were the only participants who responded to the call for participants. The whiteness of the participants is not insignificant, particularly as they all were assigned to locations where their whiteness would stand out. The participants' lack of diversity is also particularly relevant and telling of their socioeconomic status because they all had to be financially independent during their time as interns. The financial commitment is significant and thus creates a barrier to entry for those of lower socioeconomic status who may not be able to afford the cost. For example, some SDP organizations suggest that interns should be able to support themselves with an estimated $10,000 USD to cover living expenses. While it was beyond the scope of this study to explicitly unpack the racialized or gendered positions of the participants, we acknowledge that intersections of race, class, and gender would have influenced how the participants behaved in the field, and perhaps more significant, how the local communities reacted to them. This is a limitation to the current study and warrants further investigation.

All 11 participants had graduated from a four-year university, and one participant had a graduate degree. Four participants had worked professionally before their internship, whereas the other seven started their SDP internships the summer immediately following university graduation. The time the participants interned abroad ranged from eight months to 14 months. Moreover, of the 11 participants, at the time of the interviews, 10 were one year removed from their internship experience, while one was two years removed. The ages of the participants ranged from 24 to 32 years old. All the participants either grew up playing soccer or grew up highly interested in the sport and continued involvement in the sport as adults; eight played soccer on their respective university teams, while the other three played recreationally. Of note, out of all 11 participants, 10 did not know about the field of SDP before their internship experience.

Data Collection

The primary investigator initially sent emails to the AES and YDS internship coordinators, describing the study purpose and seeking permission to interview former interns. Once permission was granted, the internship coordinators spoke with former interns and collected email contacts for those willing to participate. The coordinator shared the list of interested participants with the researchers. An email was then sent to the potential participants to request an interview and 11 responded. This email exchange also allowed the primary investigator to build rapport with each participant via email correspondence by introducing himself, gauging participants' willingness to be interviewed, and laying a foundation for eventual one-on-one interviews.

The primary investigator conducted one-on-one interviews with nine participants via Skype and two in person. An interview guide was created focusing on the experiences of American SDP experiences while they were in the field. Specifically, we drew on the work of Darnell (2010, 2011, 2012) and Tiessen (2011), whose research focuses on the volunteer SDP experience. For this study, we were concerned about narratives and language that delves into the American SDP internship experience. The guide was specific to the values and experiences of working as an American SDP intern. Using this interview guide, the primary researcher conducted all 11 interviews, which lasted between 45 to 120 minutes.

Data Analysis

The primary investigator transcribed the interviews verbatim and, using thematic analysis, coded the data to inductively determine common themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Gratton and Jones (2004) define the act of coding data to be "the organization of raw data into conceptual categories" (p. 219). The steps described by Cote et al. (1993) include a coding system that systematically identifies themes from the data by creating tags, which "aims to produce a set of concepts which adequately represent the information included in the interview transcripts" (p. 130). Following the steps outlined by Gratton and Jones (2004) and Cote et al. (1993), transcripts were coded in a step-by-step process as follows: (1) carefully read the data thoroughly; (2) assign statements

relevant to the research question a code; (3) add on other relevant statements to each respected code; (4) look for patterns of relevance; (5) read through raw data that help detail the coded themes (Gratton & Jones, 2004).

The research team worked together to help ensure the credibility of the data using member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each participant was provided a copy of their interview transcript and was invited to provide feedback. This process allowed the participants to provide clarification or comments on their responses. The primary investigator also employed the process of peer debriefing with the second author to enhance the credibility of the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define peer debriefing as a process where a researcher works with a peer established in research and is impartial to the present study. The purpose of peer debriefing is to help check for inconsistencies in the study, including in the data analysis, identify areas possibly impacted by bias, and ensure conclusions are sufficiently and appropriately supported by the data. Throughout the research process, the primary investigator worked closely with the second author in the peer debrief process to review potential alternate viewpoints and interpretations, points of bias, and thematic possibilities.

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine how SDP can be a place where interns carry, and subsequently diffuse, American ideas and values to the locales in which they are stationed. The responses of the SDP interns showed how cultural and social influences contributed to various forms of Americanization in the implementation of SDP programs. From the interview data, we identified three major themes: (1) cultural tensions in the SDP field, (2) American values and ideas in SDP, and (3) how the idea of sustainability was possibly laden with American values and ideas. While these themes speak to the participants' cultural ideals in SDP, we also highlight instances whereby the participants learned valuable lessons from the tensions they encountered and subsequently attempted to adjust their approach in the field.

Cultural Tensions in the SDP Field

As the participants worked to implement SDP programs in the host country, they ran into many difficulties that stemmed from cultural tensions with the local communities. A common source of tension for the American interns was the challenge of entering a foreign country without having had much, if any, cultural, historical, or political education about that area or the local customs, ideals, or practices. The participants explained that differences between American culture and their host country's culture created tensions when they tried to implement programs; the tensions became most evident when they attempted to incorporate American ideas into the local reality. The cultural exchange pitted American culture against the local culture, and the lack of adequate knowledge about local understandings and customs created more challenges for the interns (and the local population). Daniel gave a vivid account of his experience dealing with cultural tensions, commenting on the difficulties he encountered at the beginning of his internship. Specifically, Daniel tried to establish a youth center, an American-specific institution, for children to attend after school in Uganda, where the norm was for children to return home after school. He explained,

> *It was difficult because we would try to, you know, respect the cultural differences as much as possible, but to an extent, it's almost that the cultural differences were the reasons for, you know, we are trying to break the cultural differences. So, trying to, you know go up against the idea that kids should be at home doing work all the time. Which, I mean obviously they need it, the culture within the family, they need it there, but we were trying to give the idea that kids were more than just work hands and should be able to go to you know, an after school program, which is a concept that nobody has any idea. The whole idea of a youth center and being somewhere after school as opposed to going straight home and doing work right away, like that concept, just did not make sense to a lot of the locals.*

Daniel believed that establishing a youth center, a concept he learned through his American upbringing, would be a valuable space for children to be active and creative. Similar to Park's (2011) analysis of how the American influence of a YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) in Puerto Rico was an act of implementing American ideology, Daniel's desire to create a youth center was based on producing and enforcing an American cultural product. Since he had had positive experiences in youth centers during his American childhood, he brought those memories to his internship placement. He thought establishing a youth center would be a great way to create a space for youth development. However, Daniel encountered tension with local values where young people may need to assist with familial duties. The idea of having children go to a youth center after school instead of going home seemed absurd to the local community and was challenged, which, as a result, created this cultural tension.

Rachel also expressed the pushback she experienced when she tried to bring in certain cultural ideologies that were not compatible with the local culture:

There were definitely times in meetings with our coaches when we were trying to figure out how to go about things, and they'd be like, no, we don't do it like that here, that's not the way we do it. And so, we would have to kind of be like, well, what if we just tried it or think about it and be like maybe this isn't going to work here right now. Or this, there was definitely a lot of trial and error. There was a lot of conversation, communication, and a lot of times, we had to try it differently or not try it all and, so yeah, it was definitely challenging to balance.

Illustrated in the quote is how Rachel, when meeting with coaches, possibly did not perceive how her ideas created friction. Similar to Darnell's (2011) study, which found that participants' positive sport histories and knowledge of sport motivated their SDP experience, Rachel seemed to rely on her skills and knowledge when working in SDP settings. In turn, a negotiation occurs where trial and error of ideas and practices underpins SDP practices. That is, Rachel "trying it differently" was rooted in ideals that were not compatible with the local way of life. This tension, however, indicates a degree of ideological or cultural naivety that she brought with her from her background.

When discussing her experience dealing with the way of life in South Africa, Amanda was understanding of the culture. However, she was still conflicted about what she experienced, as the local community's lifestyle was so different from what she had experienced in her American upbringing. In particular, Amanda was shocked by the gendered behavior that she saw during her internship experience. She commented,

But I mean, it's also completely cultural, you know what I mean? Like a lot the stuff we preach is based off of American values that we're trying to adapt because they are, in my opinion correct. Like you shouldn't be with someone who is still in high school if you're a grown up. Right. Like we know that. And that's so common there that at first I was like what do you mean you're dating a 16-year-old? You're 25! But I got very desensitized after a while because that's, I mean, that's what happens.

Amanda expressed her surprise and disapproval of the age difference between two people who were dating. Even more, she situated her disapproval in her American values regarding dating where she believes it is not appropriate for a 16-year-old to date a 25-year-old. From this quote, analysis yields insight into what Kidd (1991) would portray as American cultural values shaped Amanda's perceptions of dating. Importantly and critically, it was Amanda's cultural values that needed to shift about how the body is seen for her to be "desensitized" and continue her SDP work (see also Darnell, 2010).

The interns consistently relayed their concern about how the local culture and ideas needed to change and how their own American ideas mostly determined their efforts toward change. Thus, as the interns entered South Africa, Uganda, or Nicaragua and tried to implement their SDP projects, they were faced with many challenging instances of cultural tension where they had to negotiate the differences between their own values and beliefs and those of the host community. The cultural tensions that the interns faced stemmed from their lack of understanding not only of the host country and the people they were working with but also of their own lived experiences in America. The clash of cultures was pivotal in how the participants were treated and how they reacted to the various situations they encountered throughout their internship.

American Ideas and Values in SDP

When drawing on American perspectives that influenced their experiences, the participants stated that they often faced conflict in how their values correlated to the values of the people in locale where they worked. For example, the participants commonly expressed throughout the interviews that they felt American ideas of youth development or HIV/AIDS education could work if the local community would allow it; however, the participants spoke to how their ideas were not openly received. In prioritizing their own ideas ahead of those of the local cultures, the interns were enforcing processes of Americanization in the local communities. Through their American education, they had learned that HIV/AIDS was a serious issue, and as a result, they knew it was important to take measures to protect oneself to prevent contracting the virus. However, in their view, the severity of the issue was not always shared by members of the local community. Natalie elaborated on how she was challenged in this situation:

I think coming from an American perspective it's very easy to be like, "I don't understand why you wouldn't avoid HIV. Like, I wouldn't understand why it would be that hard for you to avoid HIV?" Whereas I think that local implementers see every day the pressures that the people have on them and can identify.

Natalie's understanding of HIV/AIDS as an issue that needed to be prevented was widespread, but that was due to her American cultural ideas about the issue. She had never

experienced HIV/AIDS education in a different culture and did not know how people in Uganda approached the issue. Thus, the dominant understanding of HIV/AIDS education guides how Natalie sees responsible growth through an American perspective (see Kidd, 1991).

Rachel also acknowledged that American ideas differed from those where she interned. When Rachel first started to implement a girls' soccer program in Nicaragua, it became apparent that the way she learned to value soccer was not applicable in her host community. For example, though she was afforded many resources in America as a female soccer player, those same resources were not afforded to the young girls of Nicaragua. In Rachel's interview, she spoke of how an American neoliberal idea that hard work will lead to reaching high levels of sport was not the same in Nicaragua:

I guess the culture of working hard in America and that striving because you have the opportunity to play in college, to play professional. You have these avenues. There, you don't have those outlets, so it's hard to push girls the same way that you were pushed knowing that that final goal or that goal to strive for anyway doesn't exactly exist in terms of logistics and, you know, availability.

Rachel's experience playing soccer in America taught her that if she worked hard, she could excel and reach her goal of playing collegiate soccer. Rachel's experience of hard work in sport reflected a neoliberal value that she learned in America, but this was not a value that was easily reproduced in the culture of her SDP internship where a lack of resources was a real barrier to development in the local context (Darnell, 2010). This is similar to Hayhurst's findings (2014), which suggests that emphasizing the hard work required to be a scholarship college athlete reinforces a neoliberal value that does not resonate with many cultures, partly because athletic scholarships do not exist globally. Rachel's experiences as a young girl playing soccer in America afforded her many opportunities, but for her to teach the young girls in Uganda using that mindset invoked a level of Americanization that was incompatible with local values, as opposed to allowing the young girls to create their own ideas and meanings of playing sport (Kidd, 1991).

The SDP interns also expressed how their American values and ideas never seemed to translate into SDP program implementation. Similar to Rachel, Amanda expressed that the fast-paced and efficient American work ethic was not necessarily appropriate for the YDS program implementation. Instead, Amanda revealed that it might have been more helpful to take a step back and go with the flow:

A lot of issues come when, like, were really—like, Americans are like super efficient and work really hard, especially unpaid interns that want to do the best, but sometimes kind of like going with the flow and taking a back seat and can be more helpful than rewriting the entire system and I'm speaking—I'm being very vague, but I think that's a huge problem that a lot of interns have they're trying to do too much instead of just being there to help.

The idea of hard work and pushing oneself that is represented in American culture as expressed by Rachel and Amanda was different in the Latin American and African cultures in which their SDP internships took place. That is not to say the concept of hard work did not exist, but the value of hard work and what it represents may differ and may not resonate with the values of the participants. Therefore, American conceptions such as hard work as it is defined explicitly within American sport may contrast significantly with conceptions of hard work found in other cultural contexts.

In this study, the interns brought preconceived American ideas to their internship sites and into their internship duties. Though perhaps not intentional, the interns' initial lack of awareness and reflection of their personal ideas opened the door for Americanization discourse to infiltrate their experiences unchecked. To further support this point, Elizabeth described her experience of how an American idea of making money differed from the local perspective of monetary support for everyday costs. She commented,

I mean the experience really spoke to the human condition that people are so resilient and do what they need to do to get to a goal. So, in America, it's blown up to an extreme. Right? I got to make the most money and do what I got to do, however. Whereas in the countries, or the countries we were, in Uganda, it's you know, maybe the goal is to make money to have dinner for that night which a lot of times wasn't achievable, so it's the most humbling experience to look back on.

In line with findings of Darnell's (2010) bio-pedagogy focused study on SDP interns, Elizabeth's quote highlights how her experiences were shaped by having to negotiate her ideas with the cultural and political landscape of Uganda. For example, Elizabeth contrasts the American ideals centered on making money to live a luxurious life to the view of making money in Uganda, which was about having enough to survive day by day. Even as Elizabeth may have contemplated these differences, her values still resonated in her experience during her time as an intern.

While the participants considered how their experiences may not have aligned with the realities of their host communities, the American values and ideas played a significant role in guiding their outlook. Hence, exploring the values and ideas that the participants carried with them provides insight into how the participants viewed themselves in relation to their SDP host sites.

Sustainability: Local Involvement and Buy-in

The complex relationship that resulted from the meeting of American culture and local culture led to a critical discussion about which culture's ideas were needed most to create a sustainable SDP program. In time, the interns realized the importance of appreciating the local people and acknowledging local culture in their SDP internships. Eventually, they realized that the viability and sustainability of the program were going to depend on both outside American ideals as well as much-needed local recognition.

Daniel was one of the first to implement an SDP program for YDS, a relatively new organization in Uganda. Due to the relative newness of the SDP organization, he had difficulty convincing the local community to participate in the program. In order for Daniel to get his SDP program started, he had to convince a few locals to buy into his program so that they could reach out to the rest of the community. It was only when local coaches and staff were brought in that community involvement improved. Daniel expressed his experience of having local staff and coaches involved in programming:

Oh, yea for sure, I mean, if you don't . . . you can't have long term, you can't support having just foreign volunteers coming and doing all the work because, like I said, if you don't get any help from the outside and if you get the people that can try to convince the locals. Like, I can try and tell the locals whatever I want. They're not going to believe me though unless a local person or another Ugandan person was saying, "No, he's right, this will work, try this, this is why he's doing it, your kids will help out or this will help your kids out this way."

All of the participants spoke about how it was necessary to implement programs that incorporated people from the community in order to achieve sustainability. However, from a critical perspective, when discussing sustainability as a fundamental goal, one must be aware of how various ideas, such as American ones, can potentially spread and be implicated in colonial practices. Much like Straume and Steen-Johnsen (2012), who discussed SDP sustainability in Tanzania, caution must be paid to how external practitioners may control projects and prevent local ownership. Thus, if sustainability does occur, it may occur with lineages to external ideas, values, and practices.

In Ian's interview, he spoke at great length about the importance of sustainability and how the future of SDP programs lies entirely with the people of the local community. Ian explained his reason for involving the local community in establishing sustainability in two straightforward ways:

Then as we were there longer, we realized that it's more important for the future of the program if the local staff were the ones that are leading the trainings everyday and picking up these skills of different skills to use and how to engage with the kids, give the kids positive reinforcement. . . . I think this goes back to what we were saying when we were talking about the training of local coaches. I think however much you do that and work with local people that are, you're not just the youth participants, but local partners that are going to carry on your program; however much you do that and successfully you train and work with these people is going to determine the success of the program.

During his internship experience, Ian came to realize the significant role local staff played in programming. Yet it seems Ian, along with other interns, did not acknowledge their part in the implicit diffusion of American cultural practices into the programs. When discussing sustainability as an important goal, the interns did not show much, if any, awareness of how foreign (i.e., American) ideas can spread to achieve this idea of sustainability. By acknowledging this nuance regarding sustainability, and returning to the diffusion of American values and practices, caution is warranted to how sustainability is defined and influenced by the participants' values (Straume & Steen-Johnsen, 2012).

Connecting to Darnell's (2011) finding that Canadian SDP interns relied on their knowledge and skills in their SDP relations, the participants believed their knowledge was important to share to help the program; however, it was staff from the local community who were actually teaching the community. Thus, the local coaches were in charge of teaching the local communities the ideas taught to them by the American SDP interns. In this manner, Americanization can be seen as part of the community sustainability plans as the SDP interns reproduced and disseminated American teachings throughout the local community. For example, values related to the outcomes guaranteed by hard work, negative perceptions about age gaps in dating, and the potential possibilities that come with creating a youth center can be seen as values that the participants in this study carried. As the SDP workers carried out sustainability

plans, they reproduced American ideals and values, participating in processes of cultural imperialism by way of Americanization (Donnelly, 1996). The SDP interns felt a result of their program implementation needed to be the development of a self-sustaining program led by the local leaders despite the annual turnover of interns. Nevertheless, even in a sustained program, the lasting impact of the American SDP workers, with their American teachings and ideas, could leave a lasting impact.

Summary

Ultimately, the data presented highlight that the participants were likely culpable in their diffusion of American ideals, values and experiences. That is, as we unpack the data, attention is warranted to if or how the participants were aware of their culpability in reinforcing certain American ideals and neoliberal ethics. It is difficult to ascertain such a direct connection; however, the data illustrates the ways in which the participants referred to American ideals and values. Moreover, in relation to the Americanized neoliberal work ethic presented, we recognize that the participants possibly embarked on their SDP internships as ways to build their resumes to build their sociocultural profiles with peers and potential employers. Considering this sociocultural currency, there is an underpinning of neoliberalism and American approach to life that permeated the participants' initiation, participation, and obligation toward SDP work. Thus, it is important to consider that while the participants may not have sought to dominate their internships with their ideas and experiences, their experiences working in the field were likely underpinned by them.

Whether it was negotiating cultural tensions, attempting to bring American concepts into the local culture, or convincing local people how to transform regarding SDP sustainability, the expectations of culture were pivotal in how the SDP workers approached their internship. Although, despite the influence of the SDP interns on the host communities, the interviews still showcased their appreciation of local culture. It was apparent that there was conflict when the participants wanted or believed a situation should be handled a certain way, such as HIV/AIDS education, but they understood that they had to adjust to the cultural context. Of note, the SDP interns showed they were able to learn and comprehend the importance of local knowledge and life during their SDP experience. However, in line with Darnell (2010, 2011), their work in SDP implementation was still guided by a moral imperative that conflicted with their host communities' approach to life.

DISCUSSION

Applying the framework of Americanization, critically acknowledging the one-way influence of American values and practices in sport (Donnelly, 1996), this study highlights the problematic situations American interns introduced as they attempted to carry out their SDP work guided by American-learned values and beliefs that often conflicted with those of the host populations. The experiences of the participants who carried American sporting ideas and practices to their internship sites resemble the descriptions presented in the historical SDP analysis by Darnell et al. (2019). For example, in the current study, pursuing the goal of creating a youth center and relying on American perspectives of education when implementing SDP programs, draw similarities to how sport was used to bring American influence in the Philippines or Guam in the early 1900s. The conception of SDP through an American lens produced an American narrative that influenced implementation. Critical attention to such processes in SDP sheds light on the American expansionism rooted in sporting practices.

Aligned with Darnell (2012) and Straume and Hasselgård (2014), this study exposes various similarities. In particular, American sporting discourses dominated how the participants thought about and approached their internships. For example, it became clear that American ideas and institutions such as youth centers and hard work resembled neoliberal practice (see Darnell, 2014; Hayhurst, 2014). An important point is that neoliberalism, and the idea that hard work and being resilient yields desired outcomes, is reinforced as an appropriate approach to overcome obstacles. This is problematic because reinforcing and attempting to reproduce this neoliberal value fails to account for broader social, political, and cultural implications that create inequitable spaces (Hayhurst, 2014).

Another concern is the uncertainty regarding who has the power to define SDP and the goals, values, and policies that go along with a project's implementation of SDP (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2012). For example, both Straume and Steen-Johnsen (2012) and Straume and Hasselgård (2014) highlight that SDP was viewed through a Norwegian Sports for All model, neglecting any other knowledge of SDP (e.g., from Zimbabwe) in the application of SDP activities and programs. Considering the difference between Norwegian sports and American sports, what arises is the divergent and conflicting ideas and values that permeate SDP (and these are only two countries). Guest (2009) described that SDP is rooted in the different views, expectations, and practices people have of sport and

physical activity. In many ways, findings from this study extend the needed conversations of knowledge and power in SDP implementation, and perhaps more important, it considers different values and ideas that complement and diverge from previous research.

It would be of particular interest to further elaborate on the values and ideas that are globally transferred. Specifically, moving way from Global North implementation toward more continental or South to South SDP exploration (Darnell & Huish, 2015). For example, research on Korean SDP work in Southeast Asia may be promising to compare, contextualize, and understand further the various cultural (sporting) practices in SDP implementation (see Na & Dallaire, 2016).

Practically, while organizations continue to send volunteers or interns that are young, recent university graduates, and, often come from privileged backgrounds, program managers and workers would benefit from identifying and considering the impact of their individual background and prior experiences while working to attract a more diverse pool of applicants. Thus, a future research suggestion we recommend is to examine directly if former SDP interns or volunteers are actually aware of their role in reproducing and reinforcing certain values and ideals. For example, understanding that interns may embark on their placements shortly after university, they may be intrigued by SDP work as a way to have global experiences without considering their role in producing relations of power. The importance of engaging in research that critically examines the use of interns or volunteers in SDP work is especially important for education and training. If volunteers and interns from the Global North continue to offer their services in SDP programs around the world, SDP organizations need to develop ways to educate their interns better to be reflective about their biases and culturally ingrained ideas. These sorts of opportunities could potentially open avenues for productive, reflexive, critical conversations between all actors in the SDP context.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we examined the experiences of former American SDP interns, revealing how processes of Americanization are embedded in the implementation of American SDP programs. Extending postcolonial and neoliberal critique of SDP practice, this study provides a critical examination of the role and impact of American SDP interns, providing insight into how young adults from America work within the context of SDP. SDP is a space that is not immune to processes of Americanization, which can have a far-reaching impact on target communities. In this study, we observed specific ways in which participants tried to incorporate American ideas and beliefs into their SDP internship work, and further, how they variably considered the ideas and the culture of the local community once they ran into program implementation issues. But, overall, even as they negotiated the cultural conflicts, the interns were complicit in reproducing and disseminating American teachings throughout the local community, thus becoming key players in the broader problems associated with Americanization. If SDP projects continue to emerge, nondomestic practitioners will need to consider what knowledge they bring and how they implement their values. In turn, critical SDP research and workers in the field have an opportunity to meet and discuss this tension.

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Original Research

Examining the impact of a sport-based positive youth development program for adolescent girls of color: A Mixed methods study

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ABSTRACT

Adolescent girls of color experience systemic and interpersonal risk factors that intersect on the basis of their race, gender, and age. These risks negatively influence their rates of obesity, engagement in physical activity, and overall health and well-being. Sport-based positive youth development (PYD) programs are known to address risks and build protective factors, yet little is known about how these programs specifically impact adolescent girls of color. This mixed method study examines the impact of a sport-based PYD summer camp on the holistic health of adolescent girls of color. We conducted nine qualitative interviews and compared changes in mean scores on pre- and post-camp survey measures for 35 adolescent girls of color. In our findings, we identify underlying program mechanisms and design components that influenced girls' experiences, participation, and engagement. Further, we describe positive changes reported by girls in relation to their physical, social, psychological, and spiritual health and well-being. We also present an emergent theory of change to serve as a guide for how sport-based PYD programs can be leveraged to address intersectional health and well-being outcomes among adolescent girls of color.

INTRODUCTION

Positive youth development (PYD) focuses on the inherent strengths and assets of young people (Catalano et al., 2002; Larson et al., 2006). PYD settings and programs provide opportunities for adolescents to: (a) acquire and practice specific social, physical, and intellectual skills; (b) contribute to the well-being of one's community; (c) belong to a socially recognized and valued group; (d) establish supportive social networks of peers and adults; and (e) experience and cope with new challenges (Eccles et al., 2003). Given these benefits, researchers, practitioners, and educators advocate that PYD settings play an important role in supporting the holistic development of adolescents. One group in need of such support is adolescent girls of color, especially those living in underserved communities (Yancey et al., 2006).

Due to the overlapping effects of racism, sexism, ageism, and poverty, adolescent girls of color disproportionately experience greater individual, environmental, and structural risk factors compared to other adolescent girls (Morris, 2016). Theorists and scholars find an intersectionality framework useful when describing the experiences of girls of color living in poverty in relation to their various developmental outcomes. Intersectionality theorists assert that socially vulnerable adolescents do not experience factors such as race, class, age, and gender as independent characteristics, but rather attest that these factors have meaningful and interactional effects (Collins, 1990; Constantine et al., 2006; Crenshaw, 1993). For example, research shows girls experience academic and athletic sexism, and identifying as an adolescent of color intersects

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with experiences of systemic and interpersonal racism (Crenshaw, 1993; Leaper & Brown, 2008). Thus, adolescent girls of color experience overlapping factors that result in complex health and social inequalities.

Importantly, scholars note that the physical activity rates of adolescent girls of color are impacted by intersectional demographic (i.e., race, gender, age) and environmental (i.e., culture, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions) factors. Adolescent girls of color are influenced by cultural norms and an acceptance of a fuller body size (Boyington et al., 2008), beliefs about hair maintenance derived from beauty standards for women of color (Woolford et al., 2016), experiences of hair harassment in schools (O'Brien-Richardson, 2019), and disparities in exposure during childhood to other women of color engaging in physical activity (Harley et al., 2009). This is but one example of the ways societal, cultural, and gender norms intersect to influence the overall health and well-being of girls of color during adolescence. Examples point to the need to intentionally create environments that affirm and acknowledge the unique experiences of adolescent girls of color.

We conducted a mixed method study of a sport-based PYD program designed to address the holistic health and well-being of adolescent girls of color. Our study was guided by two research questions: What, if any, program design components do adolescent girls of color perceive influence their health and well-being outcomes? How does participation in a sport-based PYD program impact the health and well-being (i.e., physical, social, psychological, and spiritual) of underserved adolescent girls of color? We further sought to develop and discuss a theory of change (ToC) of sport-based PYD intentionally designed and grounded in elements of intersectionality for adolescent girls of color. Our goal in introducing a ToC retrospectively was to guide practitioners, researchers, and sport coaches in designing culturally-affirming and evidence-based sport-based PYD programs that foster positive experiences for adolescent girls of color.

Health and Well-Being of Adolescent Girls of Color

Health and well-being are complex terms that are defined in many different ways (Linton et al., 2016). The present study was guided by a holistic perspective on adolescent health and well-being that captures multiple domains. Patton et al. (2016, p. 2426) suggest the "adolescent years are central in the development of capabilities related to health and well-being," conceptualized as social, emotional, and physical resources across the lifespan. Similarly, Kia-Keating et al. (2011) propose that mental, physical, social, and spiritual are key dimensions of health and well-being, and that they interact in a variety of ways to influence the overall functioning of adolescents. In the present study, we drew upon these definitions and focused primarily on physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of adolescent health and well-being.

Adolescent girls of color experience individual and structural barriers that impact their holistic health and well-being. These barriers exist due to complex and multifaceted risk factors interrelated to poverty, race, and gender. Within the *physical* dimension of health and well-being, studies show obesity rates are rising among adolescents from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds compared to their more affluent peers due to differences in food consumption and physical activity patterns (Frederick et al., 2014). Adolescents in the highest SES quartiles have a significantly lower prevalence of obesity than those in lower SES quartiles (Fradkin et al., 2015). In terms of race, physical inactivity is higher among youth who identify as adolescents of color than among White adolescents (Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee, 2018). Further, at the intersection of race and gender, adolescent girls of color experience heightened risks for obesity. Barr-Anderson et al. (2013) found 26% of girls of color, aged 6 to 19 were obese, compared to 16% among White females.

Race and gender also play a role in an adolescent's *psychological* health (Cohen et al., 2010). Poor psychological health outcomes are due to barriers in accessing mental health services (Yasui et al., 2015), as well as cultural and contextual issues with service delivery that include systemic discrimination and racism (Barr-Anderson et al., 2013). Researchers also found that youth who identify as adolescents of color have greater mental health concerns compared to other adolescents (Kennard et al., 2006).

At the intersection of race and gender, vulnerable female adolescents also face additional *social* risks. Studies indicate that adolescent girls of color have an increased risk for poor social skills and social exclusion and are more likely to lack a sense of purpose, hope, and a positive outlook on life compared to other adolescent girls (Shea & Coyne, 2017; Sullivan et al., 2006). Moreover, Twenge et al. (2018) found due to the pervasive and increasing use of social media and technology, adolescents, particularly females, are spending less time developing person-to-person communication and social skills, which could be contributing factors in the rise of suicide and depression among adolescent females.

Catalano et al. (2004) define spiritual health as "relating to,

consisting of, or having the nature of spirit; concerned with or affecting the soul; of, from, or relating to God; of or belonging to a church or religion" (p. 105). Within this view of spirituality is defined as a continuum of hope to hopelessness. Adolescents, especially those in high-poverty inner-city neighborhoods, are more likely to have a hopeless orientation on life that increases their engagement in risky behaviors (Bolland, 2003). In contrast, Carvajal (2012) found that hopeful or positive life expectancies in adolescents reduce risk of alcohol consumption and enhance healthier food choices as well as more frequent physical activity over time. Hence, adolescents need access to relationships, resources, and environments that help them build and access a hopeful orientation for the future.

Access to community-based activities and environments that address the holistic development of adolescent girls of color may be one way to buffer risks for less-than-optimal health and well-being outcomes among this population. However, Bates et al. (2020) found adolescent girls of color in underserved communities experience disparities in access to PYD programs and sports. Relatedly, Thomas et al. (2008) argue that adolescent girls of color have greater access to media-related activities associated with poor health outcomes rather than community-based opportunities that can promote positive social and emotional development. Given that intersecting experiences along the lines of racism, sexism, and poverty influence adolescent girls of color, in addition to the lack of opportunities to engage in PYD experiences, there is a need to develop community, school, and individual interventions that not only mitigate health risks, but also are accessible to underserved adolescents.

Sport-Based Positive Youth Development

PYD settings are contexts that can be leveraged to support adolescent development. An underlying assumption of the PYD framework is that adolescents are active producers of their own development and change (Lerner et al., 2015). Sport is one PYD setting that has been associated with a variety of positive change mechanisms that focus on health and well-being outcomes across personal (e.g., confidence, self-esteem, and academic benefits), social (e.g., peer relationships, teamwork, and leadership), and physical (e.g., movement skills and healthy active living) domains for adolescents (Holt et al., 2017). In fact, in a systematic review of the benefits of sport participation, Eime et al. (2013) found that adolescents who participated in a sport reported improved self-esteem and social interaction and fewer depressive symptoms. Super et al. (2018) also reported such outcomes noting participation in sport can influence prosocial behavior, positive health and well-being, and a sense of self-efficacy in dealing with life's stressors. Studies highlight the role of sports in achieving positive developmental outcomes and addressing social conditions experienced by vulnerable youth populations.

Notably, participation in traditional sport or engagement in play and physical activity *do not* inherently lead to desired health and well-being outcomes (Coakley, 2011). Rather, *the design* of sport-based programs, when intentionally focused on health and well-being or the development of life skills, can facilitate positive physical, psychological, and social outcomes (Weiss et al., 2013). If appropriately designed with clear goals and informed by PYD best practices, sport-based PYD contexts can provide opportunities for youth to learn important lessons, and provide them with an outlet for physical activity (Perkins & Noam, 2007). However, when, where, and for how long interventions take place may also influence youth outcomes. Williams and Yeo (2016) found the majority of interventions that aim to improve health via access to physical activity take place in school settings and do not leverage summer out-of-school time. Further, interventions are often long term (i.e., eight weeks to two years), but are constrained to a low dose and frequency due to the constraints of school hours (Williams & Yeo, 2016). Hence, gaps exist in our understanding of whether summer and higher dosage and frequency interventions lead to the positive developmental outcomes.

Adolescent girls of color have a particularly acute need for supports that address their holistic health and well-being. Sport-based PYD programs may be one intervention approach communities can take to build protective factors and promote equity and access to physical activity for adolescent girls of color. Our mixed method study seeks to examine how participation in a four-week, high dosage and frequency, sport-based summer camp influenced the holistic health and well-being outcomes of a sample of adolescent girls of color. We examined three research questions among adolescent girls of color: (a) What perceived program *mechanisms* and *design components* influence participation in a sport-based PYD program? (b) What perceived health and well-being outcomes are influenced by participation in a sport-based PYD program? (c) Are there differences in girls' holistic health and well-being outcomes following participation in a sport-based PYD program? Questions 1 and 2 were examined using qualitative interviews (n = 9) and Question 3 by comparing pre- and post-camp scores on measures of health and well-being (n = 35). We expect our study to contribute to gaps in our understanding of evidence-based practices and elements of effective program design within PYD context (Jones et al., 2017; Whitley et al., 2019). Given this aim, we synthesized our findings to

create a theory of change (ToC) that illuminated intersectional elements of sport-based PYD programs for adolescent girls of color. Although no one definition of ToC exists that accounts for all aspects of the model, our approach was to elevate the voices of adolescent girls of color to describe *how* (i.e., causal mechanisms) a program fosters specific outcomes (Breuer et al., 2016). According to a review by Bonell et al. (2016), most interventions are not designed nor informed by ToC and provide "little useful evidence about the effectiveness of the PYD approach" (p. 11). Therefore, our study sought to inform the development of effective PYD programs for adolescents who experience systemic and interpersonal risks in their communities (Jones et al., 2017).

METHOD

Study Design and Analysis

The Learning in Fitness and Education through Sports (LiFE*sports*) Initiative is a sport-based PYD program developed at The Ohio State University (OSU). LiFE*sports* emerged from a previously funded federal sports program known as the National Youth Sports Program (NYSP). NYSP was designed to engage youth living at or below the poverty line in free summer sports programming on university campuses. Following the cut of federal funding, OSU revamped NYSP to create LiFE*sports*. Each year, LiFE*sports* serves approximately 600 youth, aged 9 to 15, during a free 19-day sport-based summer camp. Annually, campers receive two free meals and transportation to and from OSU's campus via local community centers throughout the city. Outreach via community centers and through schools in zip codes with a high number of youths living in poverty are targeted for recruitment to the camp, which is provided at no cost to campers or their families. However, youth do not have to meet any poverty indicators to register. In 2017, 91% of LiFE*sports* participants identified as Black and 51% as female. Additionally, 31% of the participants were between 13 and 15 years old. In total, 80% of campers lived within 200% of the poverty line and 69% reported qualifying for free and reduced lunch (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2017).

Campers are organized according to age into groups of approximately 25 with a trained counselor assigned to each group. Most groups include both boys and girls, whereas some groups are girls or boys only, as research indicates girls' physical activity participation increases when in same-sex groups (Casey et al., 2009). Over the course of four weeks, campers participate in nine sport-based and healthy lifestyle activities (e.g., soccer, basketball) led by trained recreational sport leaders for four hours each day. Campers also engage in a daily classroom-based social skills curriculum called "Chalk Talk" for one hour. The Chalk Talk curriculum focuses on the development of four social and life skills: (a) self-control; (b) effort; (c) teamwork; and (d) social responsibility (S.E.T.S.). During Chalk Talk, campers engage in activities (e.g., role play) that ask them to utilize and demonstrate their understanding of each of the four S.E.T.S. To support Chalk Talk sessions and skills learned in sport, staff members positively reinforce and reward youth who exhibit S.E.T.S. with buttons (e.g., small pins that have a Buckeye leaf). Staff members employed at the camp often reflect a highly diverse population of college students at OSU, health and education professionals in the community, and previous campers who now serve as junior counselors. Together, staff and older youth encourage younger youth to reflect on their use of S.E.T.S. during the camp and ask youth to verbalize ways to transfer each skill to other areas of their lives at the end of every sport session (Riley & Anderson-Butcher, 2012).

To explore how the LiFE*sports* sport-based PYD summer camp influenced the holistic health and well-being outcomes of adolescent girls of color, we designed a mixed method study. We conducted individual interviews with a subsample of adolescent Black and Bi-racial girls aged 13 to 15 who attended the summer camp in 2017. Guided by scholars researching intersectional topics, we used in-depth interviews, narratives, and open-ended questions to ask our research questions (Bowleg, 2012; Hankivsky et al., 2010). We also examined changes in mean scores on three valid and reliable measures gathered using pre- and post-camp survey data. We used comparisons of changes in mean scores over time to assess how the summer camp influenced the holistic health and well-being outcomes of the sample of adolescent girls of color. We then used quantitative and qualitative findings to develop and discuss a ToC of sport-based PYD for adolescent girls of color. Procedures for both the quantitative and qualitative methods are described next. All procedures were approved by the lead investigator's Institutional Review Board.

Qualitative Procedure

Sample

Adolescent girls of color participating in the 2017 LiFE*sports* summer camp served as the sample for this study. Inclusion criteria for recruitment included: (a) completion of camp registration documents, (b) identifying as a female youth participant, and (c) reporting an age of 13 to 15 years old. Socioeconomic status was not included as an element of inclusion given our focus on race, gender, and age. To recruit participants for the qualitative

interviews, program staff assisted the researchers by sending emails to parents and guardians of 83 adolescent girls of color who met the aforementioned eligibility criteria. This included youth who self-identified in the registration forms for the camp as Black only or Black *and* Bi-racial. However, we acknowledge these groups are not monolithic and the effects of colorism, differential treatment, and biases that exist on the basis of skin tone, differentiate the experiences of girls at this developmental age (Adams et al., 2016).

After identifying eligible participants via interest expressed by parents, we worked to schedule individual interviews with their daughters and to complete consent and assent forms. In total, we recruited, scheduled, and interviewed seven adolescent girls who self-identified as Black and two who self-identified as Black *and* Bi-racial girls. Three girls were 15 years old, and six were 14. We used registration data to note that seven of the nine girls lived in households at or below the poverty level (see Table 1 for more demographic information). Interviews ranged in length from 30 to 75 minutes with an average time of 50 minutes.

Interviews

The researchers developed a semistructured interview guide to: (a) elicit the girls' broad experiences at the LiFE*sports* camp; (b) gain information regarding the girls' experiences and health and well-being outcomes (i.e., physical, psychological, social, and spiritual); and (c) probe for possible programmatic mechanisms and design components that influenced their experiences and outcomes. Sample interview questions included: "Describe your LiFE*sports* experience in your own words?" and "In what ways, if any, has LiFE*sports* influenced your physical activity?" The interviewer also utilized probes to gain greater insight into the girls' experiences by asking for specific examples.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the first author who read the transcripts several times. The first author then uploaded the transcripts to NVivo 11®, a software program designed for qualitative research. Both deductive and inductive processes were utilized to analyze these data

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Participant Pseudonym	Race	Number of Household Residents	Household Income	Receive Free or Reduced Lunch
Camille	White, Caucasian/Black or African American	3	$20,000-$29,000	Yes
Jada	Black or African American	6	Unknown	Yes
Lainey	Black or African American	7	$5,000-$9,000	Yes
Maeve	Black or African American	4	$30,000-$39,000	Yes
Makayla	Black or African American	3	$20,000-$29,000	Yes
Nina	Black or African American	4	$30,000-$39,000	Unknown
Sasha	Black or African American	4	Unknown	Unknown
Shyla	Black or African American	3	$30,000-$39,000	Unknown
Talia	Black or African American/American Indian or Alaska Native	4	Unknown	No

into pre-established health and well-being categories (i.e., physical, psychological, social, or spiritual) and mechanisms/design components (Kia-Keating et al., 2011; Linton et al., 2016). We utilized inductive analyses to identify themes from the data to create sets of integrated concepts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). The main categorizing strategy for creating broader themes was data coding as recommended by Maxwell (2005). As part of the coding process, the researchers pulled direct quotes that represented each category and organized codes into lower order, subthemes, and higher order themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Maxwell, 2005). As recommended by Patton (2015), researchers often use triangulation methods to validate themes.

We also used an expert peer to debrief findings and member check to decrease bias and ensure validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The peer who supported the debrief was a local Boys and Girls Club senior youth engagement strategist who had familiarity with the philosophy and mission of LiFE*sports.* The lead author met the professional in person to discuss a priori themes until both confirmed higher order themes. This process further validated the accuracy of our interpretation of these data. Also, as recommended by Barker and Pistrang (2005), we completed a member check, which ideally consists of respondent validation. In this case, a member check comprised asking two older teen girls who had experienced LiFE*sports*, but were not interviewed due to inclusion criteria, to review the identified themes and findings. Patton (2015) argues that in qualitative research this "alternative" check is satisfactory as long as checkers have familiarity with the program experience to provide credibility and authenticity. These two girls, still involved in various LiFE*sports* activities, had demographics similar to those of the study sample and were more accessible during the data analysis process than the girls interviewed. During the member check process, the lead researcher achieved mutual agreement with both girls in their interpretation of data.

Quantitative Procedure

Sample

Of the 83 adolescent girls of color, aged 13 to 15 that met inclusion criteria, we sought to compare changes in their mean scores over time on the three outcomes measures using pre- and post-camp survey data. Notably, high school campers did not complete pre- and post-camp surveys, rather they helped implement the surveys with younger campers. This design element of the camp removed 21 youth in our quantitative sample. We then only analyzed changes in mean scores from adolescent girls of color who completed both pre- and post-camp surveys and those who answered at least half of the items on each scale. This decision was made for three reasons: (a) completion of at least half of the items maintained the reliability of each scale (as measured by Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 or higher); (b) mean imputation can inflate correlation coefficients in small samples (Parent, 2013); and (c) we wanted to maintain our commitment to elevating the voices of the adolescent girls of color within our quantitative analysis. As a result of these decisions, we analyzed changes in pre- and post-camp measures among a final sample of 35 adolescent girls of color who attended the LiFE*sports* Summer Camp in 2017.

Measures

The Healthy Lifestyle Behavior Scale (Davis et al. 2019) was used to evaluate youth perceptions about their health behaviors, including their engagement in physical activity, intake of fruits and vegetables, time spent watching TV, and perceptions of whether S.E.T.S. helped them engage in a healthier lifestyle. The scale uses a 5-point Likert-type format (1 = *not at all true*, 2 = *a little true*, 3 = *somewhat true*, 4 = *pretty true*, and 5 = *really true*) and consists of eight items. Mean scores were calculated for campers who answered at least six of the eight items on the measure. An example item from the scale is "I can do at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day." Cronbach's alpha for the current sample was 0.86.

The Social Competence Scale (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2014) was used to assess perceived social competence at pre- and post-camp participation. The scale uses five items measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all true*, 2 = *a little true*, 3 = *somewhat true*, 4 = *pretty true*, and 5 = *really true*). We calculated mean scores based on completion of three of the five items on the scale. Example items on the scale include: (a) I help other people; (a) I ask others if I can be of help; and (a) I am good at making friends. The Cronbach's alpha for the current sample was 0.86.

Anderson-Butcher et al. (2008) developed The Social Sport Experience Scale to assess youth perceptions of their social experiences and their perceptions of their ability to work with others while playing sports. The scale consists of eight items (mean scores derived from completion of at least six items) measured on a scale of 1 = *not at all true*, 2 = *a little true*, 3 = *somewhat true*, 4 = *pretty true*, and 5 = *really true*. An example item is "I respect others when playing sports." The scale demonstrated adequate reliability in the current sample with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90.

Data Analysis

Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, we calculated pre- and post-camp mean scores on each of the measures by taking the sum of the items and dividing the total by the number of items on the measure. Then, we conducted paired sample *t*-tests to compare the differences in pre- and post-camp mean scores on the aforementioned three outcome measures. We considered results significant if $p < 0.05$ (Nardi, 2006).

Theory of Change Procedure

After we analyzed both qualitative and quantitative data, we retrospectively developed a ToC based on the interaction and pattern of factors identified in the findings (Vogel, 2012). As explained earlier, ToC is a perspective of scientific realism that focuses on the interaction among context, mechanisms, and outcomes relating to a program's effect on the participants (Breuer et al., 2016). Although the most common approach is to utilize a ToC prospectively, a number of studies have developed a ToC framework retrospectively (Breuer et al., 2016; Vogel, 2012) to assist and guide future studies. We grounded our ToC in the findings and from the literature relevant to evaluating PYD and sport-based PYD programs (Holt et al., 2017; Weiss et al., 2012).

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

We present the qualitative results in two main sections. We first detail findings of mechanisms to support participation and engagement, program design components, as well as other facilitating and inhibiting factors that appeared to influence the experiences and outcomes of adolescent girls of color in the sport-based PYD summer camp. Then, we report the girls' perceptions of how the sport-based PYD program impacted their holistic health and well-being outcomes (i.e., physical, social, psychological, and spiritual). In order to protect the privacy of the participants, pseudonyms are used to describe for the reader the experiences of each adolescent girl in our sample.

LiFE*sports* Experience

Participants discussed several underlying factors linked to the sport-based PYD program that influenced their experiences. Three main themes emerged: (a) *program mechanisms* that influenced the girls' participation and engagement in the sport-based PYD program; (b) *program design components* that facilitated positive health and well-being outcomes; and (c) *facilitating*/*inhibiting factors* to participation.

Program Mechanisms

Several themes emerged as to why adolescent girls chose to participate in the sport-based PYD program emerged. These themes included: (a) parental encouragement ($n = 6$); (b) access to new activities during out of school time ($n = 8$); and (c) opportunities to access new sports ($n = 5$). Parental encouragement included references to parents or guardians encouraging the participants to be active and attend the sport-based PYD summer camp (i.e., role models). Maeve described it this way, "Well, I never actually heard of it until my mom told me about it." The second theme included participating because the camp gave the girls opportunities to try new things during out-of-school time. Sasha described LiFE*sports* as an opportunity that not everyone has: "It's just an experience I don't really think you can get anywhere else…'cause not many kids get to do a lot of stuff outside of school and around the summer and stuff." The final theme was the opportunity to access to new sports. For example, Camille stated, "We get shown all the sports and things that we wouldn't learn at school." Similarly, Makayla said, "I thought [LiFE*sports*] would be a pretty good idea 'cause I like doing different sports, so the idea of doing different sports kinda had me like want to go there."

Program Design Components

Several underlying program design components contributed to the experiences and reported health and well-being outcomes described by the participants. The most frequent program design components described were: (a) non-judgmental motivational climate ($n = 5$), (b) social skills curriculum ($n = 7$); (c) relationships with caring adults ($n = 8$), and (d) opportunities to build new relationships through sport and play ($n = 8$).

Nonjudgmental Motivational Climate. Five participants discussed the nonjudgmental motivational climate of LiFE*sports*. Nina described being encouraged and not feeling judged when she tried a new sport at camp which motivated her:

Yeah like a couple sports like volleyball or a sport that I'm not really good at um if I like couldn't throw the ball or hit the ball well no one would really blame me, or people would usually just tell you you're good, or keep trying, or something which really helped.

When the interviewer probed Nina asking how she felt when her coaches (staff) or peers would tell her "you're good or keep trying," she responded, "Like better about myself." Relatedly, Makayla described a moment playing basketball at LiFE*sports* where she had the opportunity to

the opportunity to feel motivated:

The [basket]ball was almost going out so I picked it up and started dribbling and ran down the court and made a layup. It's like hey, I made the first point and you feel really good; it boosts you all the way up.

Statements about the overall climate of the sport-based PYD program also reflected themes such as increased confidence and competence due to youth feeling safe, encouraged, and comfortable in trying new things and playing different sports.

Application and Reinforcement of Social Skills through Sport. Seven girls discussed how learning about S.E.T.S., the four social skills framing the sport-based PYD summer camp, led to greater awareness of how they were interacting with others. For example, Lainey, Makayla, and Sasha stated that they were conscious of using S.E.T.S. as they participated in camp because of their attendance at Chalk Talk and the staff's reinforcement of S.E.T.S. during each sport. Sasha shared, "It's unconsciously there. So I might not think I'm using S.E.T.S., but I actually am most of the time." Similarly, Makayla described S.E.T.S. being intuitive or in your heart, "[You] just have it in [your] heart, you don't really have to think of S.E.T.S. it's just in [your] heart."

Four girls also reported that attending the camp and learning about S.E.T.S. helped them transfer these skills to other areas of their life. About using S.E.T.S in her day to day life, Lainey said, "It just pops into my head, it's like a quick glance at a memory from LiFE*sports* that I tried or I worked as a team or I did something responsible and I can do it again." Shyla shared how she thinks about S.E.T.S. in life outside of camp: "Cause you have to when you're out in the real world. You have to have self-control, and you have to put in effort into everything that you do, and sometimes you're gonna have to work together with people."

Relationships with Caring Adults. Eight participants identified program staff as positive factors in their overall camp experience. These caring adults at camp helped girls feel confident and competent in sports and with their peers, and were a significant reason they chose to participate in the sport-based PYD program for consecutive years. For instance, in a follow-up response to a probe about why camp was "good," Jada said, "Because the people there are so friendly, the coaches are nice and they try to make the place fun." Nina described how the coaches would encourage her, "No one would blame me or people would usually just tell you you're good or keep trying." Similarly, Lainey shared that her counselor would tell her that she just has to try and ". . . that made her a little bit more confident." She also said:

I feel like me and [counselor name] had a bond, even though we didn't know each other for a long time, I feel like we had a bond where I kinda looked at him not as my counselor but more of like a big brother.

Opportunities to Build New Relationships through Sports and Play. Eight girls described meeting new people while playing sports as a reason they enjoyed and continued to participate in the sport-based PYD program. The girls felt they developed positive relationships at the camp. Shyla stated, "Well it's just the experience, you get to meet new people, have that feeling of just running around, actually playing something, [and] learning new things like sports." The girls also shared perceptions of how playing new sports and being put in groups where they had to meet new peers impacted their experience. Talia said:

I feel like I know people there. They put you in a group with unknown people for a reason. They don't put you in a group with all your friends because that not only causes a lot of trouble, but you don't have to work with everybody.

Other participants also described how the design of the program, which places youth in groups of 25 with peers their age they don't know, helped them get to know new people. For instance, Nina shared a memory about walking to different sport activities with her teammates (group of peers she didn't know at the start of camp) demonstrating her experience getting along and having fun with them:

It's always fun when we're walking from one place to another when you're talking with your team on the way or sometimes when your whole team is actually together you get like a good laugh in.

Facilitating and inhibiting factors

Girls described experiences that facilitated or inhibited their participation. These factors speak to the individual differences and unique needs of this adolescent population. Factors included: (a) participation and competition with males; (b) skill development opportunities within the activities or sports; and (c) peer/group interactions. Three girls, Camille, Maeve, and Talia, discussed experiences related to specific sports at the camp that sometimes inhibited their participation in sport with their male peers. Camille said, "The only thing that I really don't enjoy is when we're doing sports and stuff and that the boys are more dominant in all the sports. The boys have it [the ball] the whole time and don't pass." In contrast, girl reported

enjoying individualized or girl-specific sport activities like track. Makayla remembered she particularly enjoyed "when we all [note: her all female group] ran track, not everybody ran track, and then we all just cheered each other on, people were trying their best."

Relating to skill development and opportunities, girls reported some activities or sports lacked opportunities to develop skills or were "boring." Maeve mentioned she did not enjoy football because "we had to keep running back and forth and back and forth." Talia described being bored at swimming. It was generally apparent from the interviews that sports that allowed for frequent opportunities for skill development facilitated greater participation. A final facilitating/inhibiting factor relating to peer interactions also emerged. Talia described a negative peer experience in her camp group: "It wasn't a good group to be in. I just didn't like the group." This experience inhibited her engagement and participation in sports during the camp. However, other girls enjoyed their groups and the opportunity to interact with kids their age. Lainey stated, "The sports were fun for the most part and just being around kids my age and being able to do [activities] with kids my age is fun." It was apparent that interactions and the group dynamics were important facilitators or inhibitors to the girls' participation.

Health and Well-Being Outcomes

In this section, we describe girls' perceptions of how the sport-based PYD program influenced their physical, social, psychological, and spiritual health and well-being.

Physical Health

Multiple participants described improvements in their health, physical activity levels, and in their current and future participation in sports (n = 8) as a result of their participation in LiFE*sports*. Girls reported increased activity levels, improved perceptions of their physique, and greater readiness and preparation for physical education classes at school. Talia stated that as a result of LiFE*sports*, "I work out a lot more." Camille shared how the camp influenced her physical activity, "It gets me out of the house [and] it gets me moving."

Seven girls credited LiFE*sports* with their current participation and intended future participation in new sports, due to their greater knowledge about sports and their improved feeling when participating in sports. Sasha described how this knowledge made her feel more prepared to engage in sports in the future when she said, "When we do different sports at school it's always nice 'cause I already know a lot of the stuff, so it's like nice to have that under my belt." Six girls also cited future participation in sports as a positive takeaway. Lainey said, "It's gotten me to like want to try out some more things. Right now, softball season is about to start so I'm going to do softball since we did softball at camp."

Psychological Health

Participants described improvements in their psychological health, including increased confidence, feelings of pride, emotional control, and greater maturity related to trying new things and sports in general (n = 9). Six girls described how LiFE*sports* made them feel more committed to putting effort into trying new things and never giving up. Lainey said, "I want to never give up on anything. I want to try and try and try again." Nina stated, "It's [LiFE*sports*] made me sort of have an open mind to like it won't hurt to try new things even if it seems like I won't like it."

Five of the girls discussed feelings of pride after their camp experience. To illustrate, Lainey stated, "I'm proud that I tried everything that I did and I'm proud that I didn't complain as much as I thought I would." Other participants also mentioned participation in the sport-based PYD program helped them better control their emotions, influenced their outlook on life, and impacted their perceived sense of maturity. Makayla used a metaphor to describe how LiFE*sports* helped her mature, "It's like growin' up, I'm gonna be weird but, like a caterpillar in a cocoon. I was like weird in middle school and then flurried into junior high."

Social Health

All participants described improvements in their social health and well-being, including increased social skills and improved relationships with others and family members (n = 9). Specifically, seven girls reported that they were more outgoing after participating in LiFE*sports*. Camille stated, "LiFE*sports* has helped me be more out there with making friends." Related to friendships, all nine girls discussed how camp impacted their development of relationships with their friends or peers. Jada described a long-term friendship she developed from participating in the sport-based PYD program:

My friend, she's been in my group since the first year and I've been friends with her since even when we haven't been in the same group and I just think that's really cool how we only see each other for a month out of a year and we're still friends and see each other outside [of camp].

Seven girls also spoke about various ways that LiFE*sports*

influenced their relationships with family such as playing sports together more. Makayla mentioned, "We'd go to the [basketball] court more often with my family."

Spiritual Health

Participants described improvements in their spirituality, including increased hope for themselves in the future, as well as feelings of life satisfaction and happiness (n = 8). Nina described her takeaways from the camp when she stated, "It gives you hope that you can do better or that you can do something." LiFE*sports* gave Jada hope in a different way which she shared: "I think that it just gave me hope that I could make it on to an actual [sport] team."

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Using paired t-tests, we compared changes in girls' mean pre- and post-camp scores for the following measures: Healthy Lifestyles, Social Competence, and Social Sport Experience (see Table 1). Youth perceptions improved on all three measures with increases ranging from 0.10 to 0.24. The results indicated significant increases for the girls on measures of healthy lifestyles ($p < 0.05$). Improvements on the social competence and sport experience scale were nonsignificant.

Table 2. Pre- and Post-Camp Scores (N = 35)

Scale	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	Mean Difference	Significance (2-tailed)
Healthy Lifestyle Behavior	3.73 (0.83)	3.97 (0.83)	+0.24	0.01*
Social Competence	4.04 (0.89)	4.21 (0.79)	+0.17	0.09
Social Sport Experience	4.06 (0.91)	4.16 (0.79)	+0.10	0.21

Note. *$p < 0.05$.

EMERGENT THEORY OF CHANGE

Based on our interpretation of the interviews and the quantitative findings, a general pattern of responses appeared to emerge relating to program mechanisms and health and well-being outcomes. Based on the notion that theory of change (ToC) is designed to represent how a program brings about specific outcomes (Breuer et al., 2016), we synthesized these findings into an emergent ToC to frame how underlying mechanisms and design components of sport-based PYD programs can facilitate positive physical, social, psychological, and spiritual health outcomes for adolescent girls of color (see Figure 1).

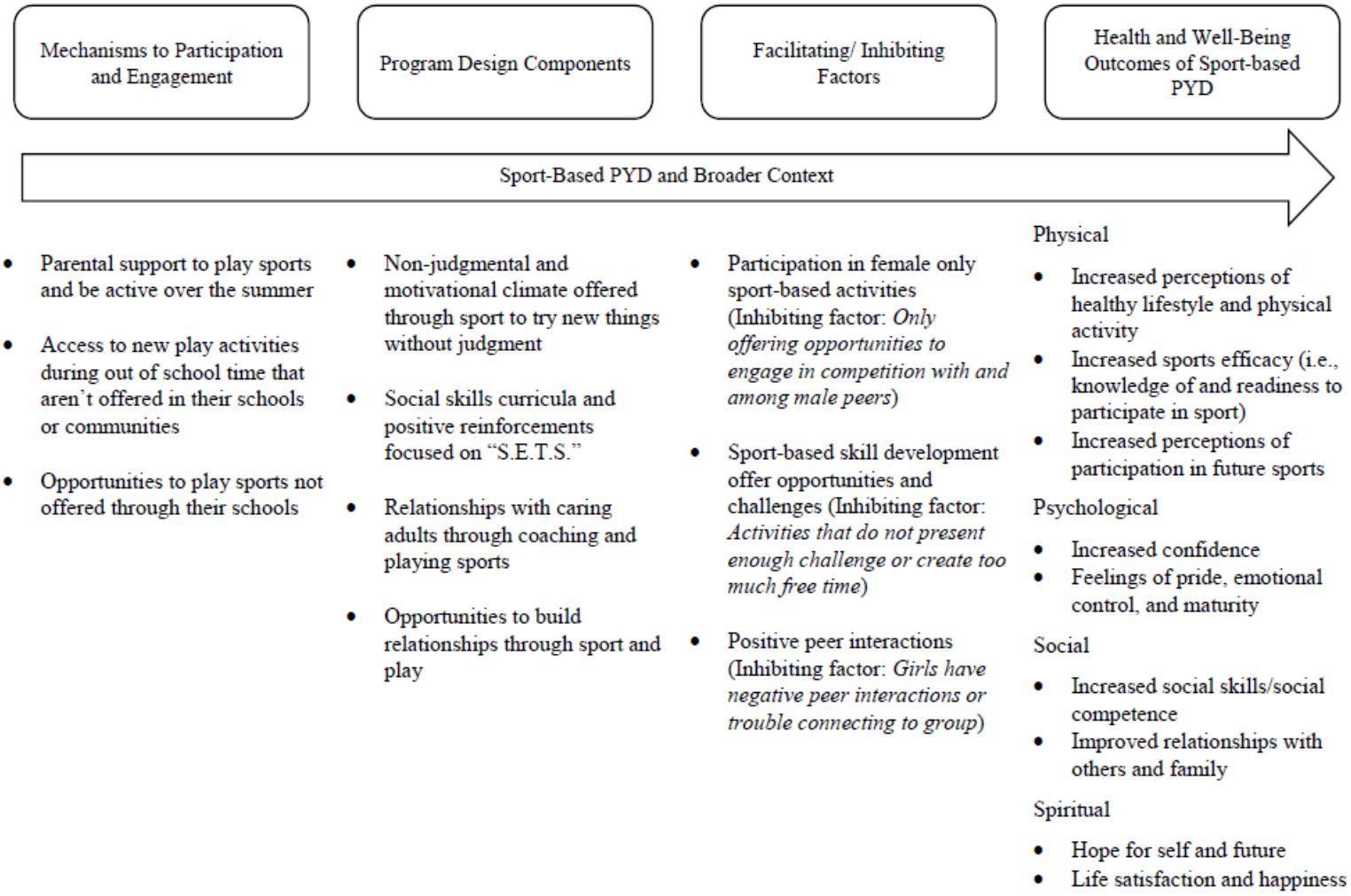
DISCUSSION

This mixed method study examined how participation in a sport-based PYD program impacted the health and well-being (i.e., physical, social, psychological, and spiritual) of underserved adolescent girls of color. Our study further explored what program design components adolescent girls of color perceived to influence their health and well-being outcomes within the sport-based PYD program. Results show that the girls perceived significant changes in all aspects of their holistic health and well-being—conceptualized as a dynamic interaction among physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions. The participants identified both explicit mechanisms embedded in the program as well as implicit factors that were especially relevant to their social skills development.

Program Design

Notably, adolescent girls of color' experiences in the sport-based PYD program were largely perceived as positive. Through their positive recounts of the summer camp experience, the girls identified several key mechanisms underlying their experiences that affirm their developmental age and intersectional identities. These mechanisms are important as growth and development through sport-based PYD programs cannot occur without continual participation and engagement (Armour et al., 2013). Specifically, the girls reported support from parents and guardians were important, along with access to new sports not offered in their schools. Findings may indicate adolescent girls of color may feel more motivated when their parents support their engagement in sport-based activities. For families living below the poverty line, these opportunities may be more accessible when they are free or offered during out of school time. Hence, to engage this population in physical activity interventions, offering out-of-school activities and targeting recruitment to parents and families may be critical for engaging adolescent girls of color in sport-based PYD programs.

Figure 1. Theory of Change for Adolescent Girls of Color in Sport-Based PYD



Related to program design components, our findings indicated the social and motivational climate, curricula and positive behavioral reinforcements, relationships with adult mentors, as well as opportunities to build sport and social skills in one setting were protective program design components. These findings align with Lerner et al.'s (2014) "Big 3" of PYD which include positive relationships, skill building, and leadership activities as important components of effective PYD programs. Scholars advocate that adolescent girls need safe spaces to express themselves without judgment, and need people and places to provide information and support (Svanemyr et al., 2015). As such, the social elements and latent reports of sexism or colorism among peers stand out as one of the most crucial design elements important to interventions designed for adolescent girls of color. For example, increased social skills reported in both the interviews and quantitative variables (i.e., social competence scores) may be associated with the intentional design component of teaching S.E.T.S.—both through sport and within the classroom context. In addition, the girls offered ideas that are grounded in intersectional elements that supported or inhibited their participation. Guided by these findings, programs that want to engage adolescent girls of color may see increased participation and positive outcomes when girls do not have to play sports with their male peers, when girl-only sports with few spectators exist in the program, and when adults tend to the formation of positive peer groups.

In addition, the opportunities to build positive relationships with peers and adults significantly contributed to the girls' positive experiences at the sport-based PYD summer camp. Authentic relationships with others are critical for this gender and age group (Thomaes et al., 2017; Tolman et al., 2006). The relationship theme is an essential characteristic that cuts across all variations of sport-based PYD programs and reviews of such programs. No matter what context, adolescents express a deep desire to form social bonds and feel a sense of belonging. Holt et al. (2017) highlighted "the critical importance of creating an appropriate social environment" (p. 39) that includes opportunities for feelings of belonging to a wider community. Time and again, the girls in the present study emphasized the enduring bonds of friendship they formed with both peers and adult mentor/coaches as a direct result of being a LiFE*sports* participant. Importantly, the uniqueness and power of sport programs can maximize these social bonds, feelings of belonging, and other aspects of health and well-being if intentionally structured with appropriate PYD program design elements and caring adults (Holt et al., 2017; Perkins & Noam, 2007). Certainly for girls interviewed in this study, LiFE*sports* served as a haven that was fun and challenging. The nonjudgmental motivational climate created many opportunities to develop and practice integration of new social skills and positive health behaviors.

Health and Well-Being Outcomes

We identified several positive holistic health and well-being outcomes via qualitative findings such as engagement in physical activity and perceived future sport participation. Our quantitative findings also indicated that participants increased their engagement of healthy lifestyle behaviors. As previously discussed, adolescent girls of color living in poverty are one of the most physically inactive and obese groups in the United States, and athletic participation rates substantially decline among these youth from adolescence into adulthood (Barr-Anderson et al., 2013; Park et al., 2014). In addition, adolescent girls of color reported positive psychological health outcomes, such as increased confidence, from their participation in LiFE*sports*. Improvements in psychological health are supported by past research suggesting sport-based PYD programs can positively influence perceptions of self-efficacy in sport, as well as general feelings of confidence and competence for engaging in sport-based activities in the future.

Social aspects of health and well-being, as illustrated by learning social skills and building prosocial relationships, were outcomes discussed at length by participants. Our quantitative findings validated this finding as adolescent girls of color grew in their perceptions of their social competence over the course of the four-week intervention, but not in their social experiences in sport. These findings may indicate the design of LiFE*sports* promotes positive social growth and development. However, participants may not become more socially competent by just playing sports, but rather when sports are coupled with intentional interactions with new peers and adults.

Lastly, participants also reported positive spiritual growth, including perceptions of hope and overall life satisfaction. In this study, assertions of "I can do it" and "I believe in myself," whether psychological or spiritual, were positive outcomes reported via participation in the sport-based PYD summer camp. Findings suggest sport-based PYD programs may be one way for adolescent girls to increase their hope, enhance their motivation, and develop skills that ultimately result in positive health behaviors (Bolland, 2003; Marques et al., 2013).

Emergent Theory of Change

Our retrospective ToC integrates mechanisms and program design components of sport-based PYD programs that contribute to positive physical, social, psychological, as well as spiritual health and well-being outcomes for adolescent girls of color in this study. The intent of our ToC was to address the gap in theory-driven sport-based PYD (Holt et al., 2017), which is especially apparent when examining the experiences of adolescent girls of color (Hermens et al., 2017). As Lerner et al. (2011) suggest, these models are needed to call attention to the complex interplay of explicit and implicit mechanisms within the design of sport-based PYD programs. The experiences shared by the participants elicited outcomes above and beyond those explicitly targeted by LiFE*sports*. Burnes (2009) noted that change is often not a linear process, but rather a continuous, open-ended, cumulative and unpredictable process. Findings from our study show that sport-based PYD programs can be intentionally designed to elicit both implicit and explicit change.

Our emergent ToC synthesizes the interconnected causal mechanisms, inhibiting and facilitating factors, and program outcomes that were described by adolescent girls of color who participated in LiFE*sports* (see Figure 1). Mechanisms for participation and engagement include familial support, access to new sports, and opportunities to engage in sport during summer or out-of-school time. We also map the importance of cultivating nonjudgmental motivational climates and generating a sense of belonging when looking to reach this adolescent population. To leverage opportunities to engage adolescent girls of color in sport-based PYD activities, practitioners and scholars can build programs that acknowledge intersectional needs including creating female-only sport spaces in addition to creating spaces that foster positive peer interaction. Together, these foundational linkages can inform the future design of sport-based interventions for adolescent girls of color.

Limitations

The present study is not without limitations. One limitation involves selection bias. Participants may not be representative of the larger group of girls who participate in the LiFE*sports* summer camp or other sport-based PYD programs in underserved communities. Further, as mentioned previously, the experiences of adolescent girls may differ on the basis of skin tone due to colorism and differences among socioeconomic status were not fully explored in this study. Future research distilling the differences among adolescent girls of color due in part to discrimination on the basis of their skin color and socioeconomic status may further advance this area of scholarship. In addition, our relatively small sample size also warrants caution in interpreting our findings. We recognize there is a possibility of social desirability bias on the surveys and among the girls interviewed in responding to questions based on what they thought the interviewer or staff wanted to hear.

CONCLUSION

Sport-based PYD programs may positively influence a broad spectrum of physical, psychological, social, and spiritual health and well-being for adolescent girls of color. Sport-based PYD programs may also be intentional interventions for adolescents in communities to mitigate environmental risks and to facilitate health and social equity. Our ToC serves as a guide for how sport-based PYD programs can be leveraged to influence adolescent girls of color' overall health and well-being in both explicit and implicit ways. The potential for sport-based PYD in promoting positive social change is reflected in one girl's statement summarizing her LiFE*sports* experience:

I felt like an eagle in the sky . . . I was running and my hair was flowing back because of my braids but it was like the air was goin'; up on my scalp and I was just going and I saw people passin' me but it was like I didn't care, I'm doin' this, that's all that mattered, everything else just slowed down and I could focus on myself. It felt like I was on top of the world.

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Thought Leadership From the Field

Levelling up: Opportunities for sport for development to evolve through esport

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ABSTRACT

As one of the most disruptive forces to the sports industry in decades, the esports industry has borrowed long standing approaches used in sport to emerge and establish itself in the sporting landscape. Esports has a growing appeal among a youth demographic that is similar to the youth demographic targeted by the Sport for Development (SFD) community. This paper examines the aspects of esports that the SFD sector can leverage to enhance program delivery to drive deeper systemic change, including leveraging gamification, harnessing the reach of mobile gaming, and capitalizing on the variety of games and consoles available to achieve nuanced SFD outcomes. The paper encourages starting increased dialogue on how video games and esport may be complementary tools for SFD organizations that want to innovate or evolve how they create and deliver impact.

Levelling Up: Opportunities For Sport For Development To Evolve Through Esport

Sport for Development (SFD) has evolved since the Magglingen Declaration in 2003, in which sport was recognized as a legitimate means for promoting social change (Svensson, 2020). In that time, SFD methodologies have evolved to include new sports and new approaches that are often contextually appropriate to a region. For example, in Cape Town, South Africa, ocean access and consistent surf saw the creation of Waves for Change, while a sports policy gap in Afghanistan created an opportunity for the SFD organization Skateistan. Innovation of SFD ranges from new sporting methodologies to unique new fundraising mechanics (Common Goal, n.d.), and alternative delivery models (Metro, 2012).

Concurrently, esports has emerged as a disruptive force in sports through redefined fan engagement mechanisms, new revenue models and income streams, as well as a decentralized sporting structure (Overweg, n.d.). Pioneering live streaming platform, Twitch, has provided alternative broadcasting options to reach spectators and fans (Overweg, n.d.), and esports' low barrier to entry for new competitive teams or team ownership means it isn't restricted by cumbersome corporations (Overweg, n.d.). The esports industry has leveraged mainstream sporting brands to tap into existing sport fan bases and accelerate expansion (Alvarez, 2017). EA Sport's (EA) primary games (e.g., FIFA, NHL, or Madden) catalyzed esports by leveraging the popularity of existing sports brands (and fan bases) to drive initial fan engagement.

Esports has emerged as a mainstream industry for two reasons: the industry has emulated aspects of nondigital sport, and it has leveraged unique fan engagement mechanisms and revenue streams attracting a coveted demographic (Singer, 2019). It is estimated esports generated over $1 billion in 2019, while the global sports industry generated approximately $500 billion in the same

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period (Ayles, 2019). While this appears to be a drop in the bucket, it is limiting to suggest disruption can be measured just by revenue generation. Esports in 2019 generated 433 million viewers, and 2017 reports indicate how one game, League of Legends, drew larger viewership than the National Basketball Association, Major League Baseball, and the National Hockey League (Jones, 2019). Revenue projections for the industry put it on pace to surpass the UEFA Champions League and Formula 1 by 2023 (Ayles, 2019). The short timeframe in which the industry has achieved these milestones is particularly disruptive. Most mainstream sports built their multigenerational reputation, brand value, and engagement over the last century. The first competitive video game events started in the late 90s and it has only taken two decades for the industry to surge in participation and uptake (Larch, 2019). Esports may not be disrupting older sports audiences yet, but they are winning significant chunks of market share with new audiences (Ellis-Jones, 2017). This has been enabled by redefined fan engagement methods and decentralization of the sport itself, as well as techniques used in video games to incentivize certain user behaviors, such as mobile compatibility and portability, interchangeability across titles and platforms, participant parity, and the by-design use of game mechanics.

The emergence of the esports industry at such scale has consequently increased the number of entities leveraging esports as a tool for good. Organizations like Kids in the Game (Boehnke, 2019), the West Ham United Foundation, and London Sport piloted some of the first eSFD methodologies. Comparatively, esports efforts "for good" appear limited to corporate social responsibility pilots, community-wide fundraising efforts (Extra Life: Play Games. Heal Kids, n.d.), or live-streaming cause-based fundraisers, and they do not employ any traditional SFD methodologies. However, a growing and well-established competitive video game scene provides an opportunity to look at how esports can be used as the "hook" in SFD methodologies.

In nearly the 18 years since Magglingen, SFD has evolved considerably. At the same time, the video game industry has evolved through the rise of online competitive play. Esports is currently the fastest growing sport (Rodriguez, 2019) largely due to unique digital and technical capabilities driving innovation in broadcasting, fan engagement, and revenue generation. The evolution of both SFD and esports has started to converge as academics begin to explore eSFD, however, their work is still nascent (Hayday & Collison, 2020). In the continued effort to advance SFD best practices, should we pay more attention to the value and opportunity of eSFD as an emerging field?

Levelling The Field: A Foundation For Competitive Parity

The virtual nature of esports means that parity of competition should exist (Hilbert, 2019). However, a lack of inclusion at a grassroots level means esports is still male dominated, and achieving a level playing field is simply just a vision. It may appear reductionist to suggest that competitive differences between genders are due to biology, but it accounts for the largest factor in competition between individuals (Thibault et al., 2010). The potential of this level playing field cannot be realized while toxic masculinity and misogyny plague esports (Lorenz & Browning, 2020). Early observations of esports shows that audiences, participants, and professional opportunities are male dominated, and online environments are abusive and toxic toward women (Seiner, 2019), even though increasingly women appear to be playing video games more than men in the United States (Saltzman, 2019). Women account for 44% of video games sales but make up only 5% of professional gamers (Yabumoto, 2018). The esports gender gap extends to employment, wages, and all professional opportunities (Valentine, 2018).

It is not uncommon for SFD programing to focus specifically on girls and promoting gender outcomes, and in some cases, programing for boys and girls is separated to achieve those outcomes. As Saavedra (2009) points out, "Sport can be a powerful, and potentially a radical and transformative tool in empowering girls and women and affecting gender norms and relations throughout a society" but goes on to highlight the "paradoxical" nature of this, given "sport can be a bastion for male privilege and power" (p. 124). Esports is in its infancy. At this nascent stage of the sport, greater intentional involvement from women can change the sport's destiny and prevent exacerbating gender stigmas (Featherstone, 2017). A key step to reducing the gender gap in esports is the development of grassroots opportunities in esports for both young boys and girls (Impey, 2019), and this is something toward which SFD programs can contribute. The elements for a level playing field and mixed-gender competition are present. It is likely that because of this parity, esports can avoid some of the gender controversies that plague other sports, but there is a lot of work to be done (Ingle, 2019). Esports programing within SFD methodology could create an opportunity to design truly integrated curriculums and methodologies that become another effective way to achieve gender outcomes.

Esports, as a tool for equality, is not limited to addressing gender. Esports can be a platform through which the first steps of social cohesion are encouraged between groups that are unable to physically congregate. A number of award-

winning SFD programs have specialized in bridging ethnic and social divides. PeacePlayers International, for example, has successfully done this by bringing together Jewish and Arab youth in Israel and Palestine (Masters, 2015), and Catholic and Protestant youth in Northern Ireland through basketball (Scott, 2018). Using video games as a tool to tackle social development issues may appear ethnocentric to some critics, however, access to video games across socioeconomic contexts is rising and could become the next technological force for good (Nthite, 2018). Thus, could complement existing work by organizations such as PeacePlayers International. Parity of competition should enable an inclusive sporting experience. This playing parity might also encourage mixed-ability SFD methodologies. Virtual arenas moderated by SFD organizations could be inclusive, enabling fair and equitable competition among individuals of all abilities and backgrounds.

Mix And Match: An Interchangeable Medium

Esports encompasses competitive gaming across different titles (games) and different platforms (consoles). For example, in games produced by EA, playing controls follow similar patterns. Additionally, each game can be played across different platforms. This interchangeability isn't present in mainstream sports, where learning the new physical skills to play a game adequately can take time. For example, some elite cricket players will only play test cricket and not limited overs cricket, or elite rugby players that play 7-aside rugby do not also play the full form of Rugby Union or Rugby League. This is usually because of the different skill set required by athletes across the different formats. The esports barrier to entry is lower because games have fewer unique physical or mental requirements. To transition from football to hockey or basketball requires learning the physical attributes of each sport. In contrast, games of a similar type, or genre, have almost identical playing controls and require little or no re-learning.

An interchangeable medium (games) means different opportunities to engage a broader demographic of beneficiaries. The sport underpinning an SFD model can be influenced by community interest, available coaching, physical space requirements, and funding. An esports platform complements existing SFD models and has a variety of games that can broaden the appeal of a program to beneficiaries. For example, some beneficiaries could be interested in an eSFD program because it is potentially free of certain sporting stigmas (Taub et al., 1999). A stigma-free sport as the base of an SFD curriculum could lead to better inclusion outcomes across ability and gender. Interchangeability can lead to stronger development outcomes and participant retention in part by attracting new participants who might otherwise be excluded from physical sport. Participation itself isn't the aim, but if more participants are attracted to a SFD program, the organization's impact stands to increase. Traditional SFD organizations have been criticized when scaling programing because scale can dilute the impact on participants. ESFD may increase participation, but organizations should ensure that programing quality is not affected.

Not discounting the start-up and maintenance costs to organizations when implementing esports, once established, the switching costs between games is minimal. For example, after an organization spends the upfront cost of buying video game consoles to run a program, the cost of switching to a new game is limited to the cost of the game itself. This cost is much lower than the human, temporal, and financial costs of switching physical programing between sports, such as from football to cricket, which would require the development of new methodologies, a different playing space, new training for coaches, and new equipment. In esport, "learning" a new sport is fast tracked by slick virtual tutorials, and participants don't actually have to physically learn the sport itself. Scalability in eSFD programs may be more sustainable in some instances because of their reduced physical footprint. This makes a diverse and variable eSFD program realistic and affordable for the organization. Beneficiaries have the option of different games to achieve a desired outcome. In this argument, interchangeability assumes minimum levels of access to technology, technological literacy, and affordability that would detract from the purpose of this paper, which is to encourage high-level, open-minded thinking about the value of interchangeability to sustainable scalability within SFD programing. Future research into some of these nuances would help advance eSFD. The value of interchangeability may be in the ability to "refresh" SFD methodology and curriculum in an affordable manner and to increase appeal within a demographic or to attract new individuals to a program.

Anywhere, Anytime: Absolute Portability

The evolution of video games, particularly after the rise of social gaming and the shift from console-based, offline gaming to online competition, has prompted game publishers to rethink how players access their games. Mobile versions of video games, such as Players Unknown Battle Ground or Call of Duty Mobile, provide a player experience similar to consoles while being accessible to audiences previously excluded by console costs (Krishnaswamy, 2020). Data streaming quality has improved the mobile experience (assuming an urban/peri-

urban context in developed countries). Next-generation consoles, like Google Stadia and the outcome of the new Microsoft-Sony partnership, will expand portability. The aforementioned organizations are racing to develop an all-platform, video-games-on-demand streaming service like Netflix for video games (Handrahan, 2019).

SFD curricula vary in length, with the shortest lasting a few weeks and the longest spanning an entire year. Driving outcomes for beneficiaries is a function of the amount of time individuals spend engaged with the program (Coalter, 2013). The longer a beneficiary is participating in a SFD program, the more likely they are to achieve desired outcomes and the deeper those outcomes could be (Coalter, n.d.). Program length is not the only variable influencing outcome efficacy, but the assumption is sufficient for this exploration. Esports is an opportunity for youth to engage with a curriculum in a self-led manner after their in-person session has ended.

Esports gives SFD organizations options. It gives organizations affordable customizability over program content, frequency of engagement, remote programing, and more. Esports offers an opportunity for beneficiary engagement beyond the times and spaces that beneficiaries gather for SFD programing. While some SFD programing goes beyond the program time, not all programs provide "homework" or additional post-program activities that contribute to program outcomes. Esports also opens up the possibility for greater engagement of program participants over a shorter time period, thus, in theory, enhancing outcomes. An integration of esports into SFD programing could allow programs to engage youth beyond their facilities, opening opportunities for greater inclusion in participation, an alternative means of engagement should programing be disrupted, and a mechanism for further peer-led engagement. The portability of video games potentially frees beneficiaries from the restriction of schedules and allows them to continue to work toward program outcomes at their own pace. Although not suitable for all participants, the possibilities created by the portability of video games have their own merits. Realising the potential of these possibilities would require an adaptation of curriculum and is not automatic. This could, however, mean that whenever and wherever beneficiaries play, they may be working toward program outcomes. For example, while sport was suspended globally due to the COVID-19 pandemic, esports flourished. Esports viewers and participant figures soared (Epstein, 2020), and one could assume digital delivery of SFD methodologies through esports may increase program resilience in the face of unforeseen circumstances.

The Future Is Now, The Future Is Mobile

SFD programs across the world prioritize youth beneficiaries (Blom et al., 2015). These programs reach a population that is increasingly technologically literate. There is value in conceptually exploring how esports can potentially complement the deployment of SFD methodologies while acknowledging that access to technology is varied and that there are many layers to the digital divide (Lafleur et al., 2020). The digital divide appears across developed and developing countries, as well as between urban, peri-urban, and rural communities within individual countries. This paper assumes an urban/peri-urban focus within developed countries. In these countries, access to smartphones, mobile connectivity, and digital content has grown rapidly. Youth are increasingly growing up as "digital natives" (Joshi et al., 2018). Basic smartphones are not so basic anymore. With an increasing range of applications, youth are consuming more media online, and their ability to engage across long distances is evolving (Ayllón et al., 2020). Beyond youth interest in digital technology and games, a key benefit of esports is the digital reach, scale, and access it can offer (Qian et al., 2019). Contextual relevance is necessary when evaluating how SFD has evolved in different regions, but the global technological evolution is trickling down across most countries and continents from urban to rural communities.

Video games have evolved beyond traditional hardware and consoles increasing their presence across our smartphones and tablets (Chikhani, 2015). Accessing virtual arenas and content doesn't require the same physical access one may need when playing a sport like basketball. Mobile access and portability of access means that delivering an eSFD program comes with less of the spatial requirements of traditional programing. Esports could reduce spatial requirements for program delivery if the sport is played on a device. Handheld devices not only take up less space, but they can also be used in multiple locations. Participation will still require a stable internet connection and device access. Assuming both are satisfied, participation in an eSFD program may require fewer staff to implement. There is also the possibility of remotely coaching participants. The opportunity for remote participation in programs and broader participant-group composition could hold real value for SFD organizations with unique contextual challenges. Remote participation in turn could reduce the long-term cost of delivering programs, create stronger and deeper connections, enable programing that might be impacted by public health changes (e.g., COVID-19), and increase digital skills.

As SFD programs evolve and develop, so too will their curricula. Esports elements of SFD programing are an opportunity to introduce digital skills, digital education, and digital literacy in an SFD setting. They also offer a natural gateway to conversations about science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education and employment in ways other mainstream sports may not. Digital and technology outcomes are a natural integration to esports programing because the sport is digital. SFD programs that embrace esports in their programing may also find they attract at-risk or vulnerable individuals who were otherwise not interested in their services. Greater program inclusivity through mixed-ability participation is another new possibility. Esports, though virtual, is potentially able to demonstrate similar social, collaborative, and communication skill development to traditionally physical sport with possible additional benefits (Halbrook et al., 2019).

Achievement Unlocked: Gamification Is King

Video games are built on a series of game mechanics that influence participation rates, engagement levels, and performance. Game mechanics have long been a tool to influence behavior change (Sailer et al., 2017). Gamification, the intentional use of game mechanics to change the behavior of an individual, has not been confined to digital games. In fact, we see the use of gamification across our day-to-day lives in the form of consumer loyalty schemes, performance dashboards, participation leaderboards, and more (Robson et al., 2015). However, it is in video games that we see the most consistent and successful uses of game mechanics to drive in-game behavior and participation. Leaderboards and achievement lists are just some of the game mechanics that can influence participation and behavior. Leaderboards encourage further play in order to improve one's rank and achievement lists can be designed to encourage exploration within the game beyond the primary story arc or repeat participation (Robson et al., 2015).

Based on anecdotal evidence from conversations with a number of SFD organizations, many are not intentionally aware of game mechanics and gamification. If elements of gamification and game mechanics exist within their programing, this is coincidental and not by design. The number of different game mechanics are exhaustive, but a specific category of game mechanics called performance-condition mechanics (also known as victory-condition mechanics), control how a player wins a game or achieves a task. Conditional mechanics (conditional on certain actions or behaviors) include goals (or achievement lists), quests or missions, performance races, and even structure building (Maloney et al., 2015). Each of these mechanics motivates the participant toward improved performance. In an SFD context, this could be an intentional function linked to the achievement of specific outcomes. The intentional introduction of gamification elements and game mechanics such as victory-conditions to SFD programing could directly drive longer, deeper levels of engagement, higher quality outcomes, and an increase in beneficiary retention. One SFD organization that has built gamification into its program design is The Running Charity (TRC) based in London, UK. Gamification is employed to provide each beneficiary with a unique development pathway that they traverse at their own speed. Beneficiaries achieve their outcomes at different rates, but the motivation of their gamified pathway remains and is enhanced by performance-based incentives. If an SFD organization wasn't ready to introduce esports within their programing, they could still benefit from gamifying aspects of their programing. Game mechanics can be designed into a program and TRC is a proven success story when it comes to implementing nondigital game mechanics into program design. While the case study of TRC predates the influence of esports, that doesn't mean the SFD community cannot learn about the value of gamification and game mechanics from esports. TRC is an excellent case of how game mechanics can enhance programing. TRC's use of game mechanics was the result of years of programmatic evolution. For organizations without the time and in-house expertise to gamify their programing, esports may be an off-the-shelf solution with built in gamification. Carefully selecting the right video game for your esports program can link to the desired outcome delivery.

Much has been written about the possible negative effects of video games. This is primarily linked to violent games with potentially negative implications to behavior change (Greitemeyer, 2014; Przybylski et al., 2009). SFD programs could achieve greater, more sustainable, positive transformational behavior change by choosing the right game (the avoidance of certain games is part of a broader ethical discussion), using online and offline game mechanics, and combining these with the other aspects of e-sports (e.g., mobility and portability).

The Future Is ESFD?

This paper's aim is to stimulate dialogue on the intersection of SFD and esport. It set out to explore how SFD organizations can enhance delivery of programing considering the introduction of esports. SFD esports programs appeal to similar demographics and this creates an area for further exploration. SFD growth since 2003 has legitimized the community within the development sector

as evidenced by the mention of sport as a tool to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (Lemke, n.d.). Esport's rise within the global sports sector should not be ignored (Leonsis, 2020). To date, esports initiatives "for good" have tended to be branding exercises or fundraising efforts. SFD programs that aim to maximize participant reach, program outcomes, and beneficiary engagement can benefit from leveraging esports. Organizations able to increase reach, retention, and performance may find it maximizes the impact returned for money that is invested.

Esport's benefits include portability of access and engagement, interchangeability of the game, motivating design features (game mechanics), and a parity of competition. Each of these elements, even if introduced separately, stand to potentially improve the delivery and capacity of SFD organizations that are attempting to maximize the impact of their programs. There is also the consideration that youth are increasingly engaging with games in a social manner and that modernizing SFD programs might be achieved by complementing physical sport programing with virtual sport programing. Any esports methodology that is developed should consider the possible negative consequences that can arise from video games and build into the program's design active mitigations (McCarthy, 2016).

Existing SFD models have been developed to target a wide range of outcomes. SFD methodologies tackle complex, systemic social issues like ethnic divides (e.g., PPI), homelessness (e.g., The Running Charity), mental health (e.g., Waves For Change), inclusive sport (e.g., Change Foundation), sexual reproductive health and education (e.g., Tackle Africa), and refugee integration (e.g., Laureus Germany). SFD model efficacy is still being researched and, although there is growing evidence to suggest these models can be effective, there are still questions that exist about the quality of evidence from the field (Whitley et al., 2019). This does not suggest that this programing should be replaced, but the addition of esports to SFD programing tool kits could have positive benefits either as a complement to traditional methods.

As with any disruptive force to a sector, there are often more questions than answers. Esports is a potentially exciting new platform to drive youth engagement within SFD programs. Counterbalancing that excitement is the fact that there is much more research needed on this topic. This paper has started to highlight, conceptually, some of the ways that SFD programing might benefit from an esports complement. In the same way that some physical sports can be dangerous to youth (contact sports, concussion risks, action sports), esports does present risks. Mainstream media have been quick to highlight the potential negative consequences of video games and esports: cyber bullying (Yang, 2012), the negative effects of excessive screen time (Ballard, 2017), the potential of certain games to endorse violence (Carnagey, 2007), unregulated elements of gaming akin to gambling (Drummond, 2018; Griffiths, 2018), and health challenges. It should be noted that these consequences are always a result of excess and that in moderation there is real value in video games. Esports is not a silver bullet, but it may allow us to achieve outcomes that aren't possible in existing traditional sport-based models. More donors, scholars, and practitioners should evaluate the potential of esports, and SFD organizations should be open to exploring how esports might enhance delivery of their work. We should proceed with an open mind to investigate the value of esports to the SFD community.

As an established part of mainstream culture, esports may incorporate unique characteristics into the design of SFD programs. This could improve program performance, flexibility, customizability, reach, and resilience. The impetus for the growth of esports in SFD is not guaranteed. It requires open-minded collaboration. As esports brands look to expand their footprint, there is every chance that current "for good" efforts evolve to be more holistic. This could fit in nicely with the ambitions of SFD organizations that are interested in attracting new funding partners/stakeholders. A collaborative process may yield the greatest successes if SFD and esports organizations collaborate in the mutual interest of creating social change through esports (Svensson & Loat, 2019). While this paper has explored how esports can contribute to the SFD community, there is also further scope to explore whether SFD can benefit the esports community. The opportunities to evolve SFD programing presented in this paper suggest that eSFD may enhance program delivery. As esports keeps growing, SFD organizations may find it valuable to innovate and test these new methodologies. The first step is increased dialogue and discourse on the topic, for, as one might say, there are many levels to this game.

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